



Defying Dictatorship

Essays on Gambian Politics, 2012 – 2017

Baba Galleh Jallow

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Also by the author

Leadership in Colonial Africa: Disruption of Traditional Frameworks and Patterns. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014

Leadership in Post-Colonial Africa: Trends Transformed by Independence. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014

The Kwame Nkrumah Cartoons: A Visual History of the Times, 1961-1966. Accra, Ghana: Woeli Publishing, 2014

The Catholic Voice in Ghana: Speaking the Spirit of Vatican II. Accra, Ghana: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2015

Rambler's Chats: Ghanaian, African and Global Histories through the eyes of an Nkrumahist Columnist. African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin – Madison, 2012

The Graveyard Cannot Pray. Leicester, UK: Global Hands Publishing, 2013

Mandela's Other Children: The Diary of an African Journalist. Louisville, KY: Wasteland Press, 2007

The Anatomy of Powercracy and Other Essays. Louisville, KY: Wasteland Press, 2006

Angry Laughter. Louisville, KY: Wasteland Press, 2004

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Essays on Gambian Politics, 2012 – 2017

Baba Galleh Jallow

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in Africa

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of all who lost their lives in the struggle against the backward dictatorship that ravaged our country from 22 July 1994 to 1 December 2016. That this book is published in The Gambia and available to the Gambian public is testimony to their resounding victory and to the victory of truth over lies, of justice over injustice and ultimately, of the pen over the sword.

About the author

Baba Galleh Jallow teaches history at La Salle University in Philadelphia, PA. He holds a PhD in African History from the University of California at Davis (2011), a Master's degree in Liberal Studies from Rutgers University, New Jersey (2005), and a Bachelor of Arts in History and Political Science from Fourah Bay College, the University of Sierra Leone (1991). His research interests include the history of colonial and post-colonial Africa, cesorship and state formation in Africa, Vatican II, and



Catholics and Social Justice in Africa. His scholarly publications include *The Catholic Voice in Ghana: Speaking the Spirit of Vatican II* (2015), *Leadership in Colonial Africa: Disruption of Traditional Patterns and Frameworks* (2014), *Leadership in Postcolonial Africa: Trends Transformed by Independence* (2014), *The Kwame Nkrumah Cartoons: A Visual History of the Times, 1961 - 1966* (2014) and *Rambler's Chats: Ghanaian, African and Global Histories through the eyes of an Nkrumahist Columnist* (2012). Before going into exile to the USA in September 2000, Baba was a journalist and newspaper editor in The Gambia.

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I wish to say a big thank you to *Gainako* Online Newspaper, *Kairo News*, and *Maafantá* who over the years provided a platform that made it possible to share the essays in this volume with thousands of Gambian and non-Gambian readers. Many thanks also go to the managers of Gambia-L, the Community of Gambianist Scholars and the Writers Association of Gambia listservs through which I shared these essays. To those readers on all these platforms who encouraged me to keep writing when for painfully extended periods I sounded like a lone voice in the wilderness, I say thank you for the additional inspiration. Giving up the struggle was never an option for me, but it helped to hear an encouraging voice once in a while. I also want to thank my good colleague, friend and brother Demba Ali Jawo for finding time to write the foreword in spite of his obviously busy schedule as The Gambia's new Minister of Information. I must say bravo and a big thank you to all those Gambians and civil society organizations who voted for change and who between 9 December 2016 and 19 January 2017 told the dictator to his face that we would no longer be held hostage by a banal dictatorship. Finally, many thanks go to Aloa Ahmed Alota and his colleagues at CENMEDRA - the Centre for Media and Development Research in Africa - for publishing this work.

About CENMEDRA

CENMEDRA – the Centre for Media and Development Research in Africa – is a knowledge centre. Registered as an educational charity in The Gambia on 3 March 2014 it aims to promote, facilitate and disseminate research in media, communication and development in Africa. Its activities are focused on five main areas namely media research, researching development, new media and society, education, and publication. In line with its underlying aim of research application, it shares its research results with policymakers, media and development practitioners, media houses, regulators, scholars, politicians, librarians, activists, donors, development agencies, and the wider research community. It has a two-tiered governance structure: a board of trustees drawn from the media, civil society and academia, which provides strategy and policy direction, and an administrative secretariat that is responsible for operations and policy implementation.

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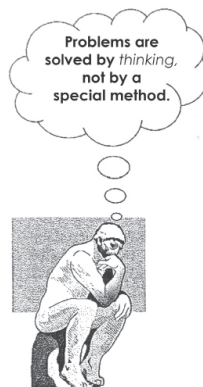
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VALUE

- Integrity
- Openness
- Creativity
- Diligence



(Adapted from Thomas, G., 2011, p.4)

Foreword

This book is both a statement of revolt against dictatorship and a study of the anatomy of dictatorship. It offers a nuanced analysis of the intricacies of authoritarianism using the 22-year long dictatorship of Yahya Jammeh in The Gambia as a case study and has resonance well beyond the country's borders. Indeed, all oppressed peoples across the world can easily identify with the issues, concerns and challenges addressed in this collection of incisive essays.

Yahya Jammeh came to power on 22nd July, 1994 through a bloodless coup that brought to an end the 30-year rule of the government of Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara. Dubbing themselves "Soldiers with a difference" Jammeh and his Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC) accused the Jawara government of over-staying in power among other charges, but ended up overstay in power themselves. Over a span of two decades, Jammeh, a young military officer at the time of the coup (he was merely 29 years old at the time) metamorphosed from being a novice politician into a brutal dictator of the worst breed, ranking in notoriety with the likes of Pol Pot of Cambodia, Idi Amin Dada of Uganda, Mengistu Haile Mariam of Ethiopia, Sanni Abacha of Nigeria, and Hissene Habre of Chad. Murders, forced disappearances, imprisonment without trial, arson attacks on media houses, torture, and endemic impunity were the trademarks of the Jammeh regime. Under him, Gambians and non-Gambians alike resident in the country quaked in terror at the monstrosities that were repeatedly unleashed on them. Given the scale of the atrocities of his regime, it is no exaggeration when some people refer to Yahya Jammeh as the "butcher of Kanilai". He did not go unchallenged, however.

The author, Dr Baba Galleh Jallow, is well placed to defy and comment on the brutality of the Jammeh regime because he experienced it first-hand. His newspaper *The Independent*, for example, was attacked by arsonists twice; first in September 2003 and then in April 2004 when its printing press was burnt down. Prior to that, he himself had several brushes with the regime before eventually relocating to the United States where he pursued further studies. Armed with advanced degrees in the humanities, Baba Galleh has since then been deploying his formidable intellectual might to defy and demystify Yahya Jammeh and his rogue regime. Part of the result is *Defying Dictatorship*.

It is clear from Baba's analysis that a dictatorship is only as strong as the people allow it. This collection of essays is a good testimony to the author's conviction that no dictatorship can withstand the determined collective will of the people. On Thursday 1st December 2016, the Gambian people demonstrated to the entire world that people power is unassailable. Through the ballot box, they brought to an end a regime that had systematically abused them without respite for over two decades.

Anyone conversant with the Gambian political terrain will no doubt agree with Baba Galleh that Jammeh's defeat at the polls came as a very big surprise to him. He never expected or even anticipated the defeat, certainly not under the tightly-controlled system that he had put in place. However, in spite of all the hurdles he

had placed in the way of the opposition, which of course included reserving the exclusive right to appoint the chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission and all commissioners and other staff of the IEC, Gambians were still determined to vote him out.

It is quite obvious that Mr Jammeh had absolutely no doubt that he was going to win, and that the opposition was going to challenge the results in the courts. It was in anticipation of such a challenge that he deliberately failed to appoint judges to the Supreme Court, no doubt with the intention that when the opposition took their challenge to the court, they would find no judges there to hear their case. It was therefore quite heartening that the self-styled “Babili Mansa” (the King who built Bridges) eventually had to take the same bitter pill that he had prescribed for the opposition. In fact, some political analysts attribute his initial acceptance of the results to numbness of his brain as the implications of what had just taken place took some time to sink in, and when it finally did, he had to find a ‘good’ reason to wriggle out of it, hence his decision to make that infamous volte-face.

In *Defying Dictatorship*, Baba Galleh Jallow repeatedly warns Jammeh of his impending fall from power and tells him to his face that he and many other Gambians refuse to be denied their right to express their opinions, criticize their government, and record for history and posterity the nature of his regime’s brutal crimes against the Gambian people.

Demba Ali Jawo

Banjul

7 April 2017

Preface

The odyssey that gave birth to this book began in early 2000 when two immigration officers walked into *The Independent* newspaper offices, then located at Westfield Junction, Serekunda. The sombre looking officers requested to talk to me and upon inviting them into my office, I got the surprise of my life. I was informed that they were sent by the Director of Immigration to enquire into my nationality. Basically, the Jammeh regime was saying that I was not a citizen of The Gambia. Their “investigations” into my nationality reached my home town of Farafenni where they “invited” both my parents to the police station and interrogated them at length over where I was born. My mom and dad, who had never read a word of what I had written or published in the newspapers because they had no Western education, were subjected to a whole day of harrowing interrogation before their ID cards were seized and they were allowed to go home. After that interrogation, my parents never rested until I left the country for exile in the United States in September 2000. They both passed away without ever possessing another ID card. And they both passed away while I was in exile and could not attend their funerals.

Their questioning of my nationality was the latest in a series of harassments, intimidations and arrests I had suffered under the Jammeh dictatorship. Both as editor of the *Daily Observer*, before it was bought by the government, and as the founder editor and CEO of *The Independent*, I had several times been arrested and detained by the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) and the Police Serious Crimes Unit. I was never charged with any crime or arraigned before any court of law. All my arrests had to do with stories or editorials I had published in the two papers. Had it not been for my parents’ persistent worries about my safety, I would not have left my country for exile. I probably would have suffered the fate of Deyda Hydara or Chief Ebrima Manneh, my fellow journalists of blessed memory.

Going into exile only strengthened my resolve to continue speaking out against dictatorship in my beloved country. There was no option but to continue defying the Jammeh dictatorship not only as a way of insisting on my right to express my views and opinions on matters affecting my country, but also as a way of helping The Gambia avoid sliding into civil conflict like so many African countries. My inspiration was pure love for country, a love so deep as to defy articulation in any way than a persistent stream of protest against anything and everything that threatens its safety.

As I introduce readers to the essays in this collection, it will be evident that my defiance against the Jammeh dictatorship did not preclude a certain desire to see him govern justly and therefore succeed or at least avoid falling into the kind of desolate historical landscape into which he eventually fell for failure to listen to reason. At the height of their power, all dictators suffer from a bad case of mental blindness born of hubris that eventually drops them right into the trash can of history. Ernest voices of goodwill advising caution are disregarded with a sad spirit of nonchalance fed by illusory fantasies of endless power and glory. Hence, Jammeh perhaps did not even notice the simple message in the poem below, which I wrote

after the violent crackdown on Solo Sandeng and the UDP (United Democratic Party) leadership on 14th April 2016. In the aftermath of that brutal slaying of an innocent and patriotic Gambian, I almost felt as if even the clouds were sad at the tragic spectacle of a man literally destroying himself without noticing it.

Sad Clouds

O man of power
Do you not see the pain?
In the eyes
Of all those grieving souls
Staring straight at you
Do you not hear the screams
Of all the trees and birds and lizards
The anguished pleas
Of the fleas and the bees
Buzzing around you
Do you not hear
The violent protests
Of the earth
Everywhere you go
Do you not hear the cries
Of abused power
From the silent hell
Of violent history
Do you not see the sadness
On the faces
Of the passing clouds
As they watch you fall
From the blows of
Your own power?

Dictatorship is by nature self-subversive and self-destructive. The dictator's sick and bloated ego is perpetually inflated by the illusory glitter of wealth and glory and the cacophony of sycophantic voices repeating to them the lies they want to hear and shielding them from the truth they need to hear. An easy mix of convenient truths and fantastic lies suits the occasion of boundless power all too well, but dissolves into oblivion as soon as reality strikes as it did in The Gambia on 19 January 2017. On that fateful date, Yahya Jammeh, Gambia's self-styled "dictator for development" who threatened to rule us "for a billion years" realized that he had one of two hard choices: Either flee into exile in disgrace or face arrest or possible death at the hands of the ECOMIG forces. He chose to swallow whatever pride he had left and flee rather than face the ECOMIG guns and boots. He now lives in exile in a distant land, in the same prison of the spirit into which he had driven me and many other Gambian brothers and sisters.

And so we exchange positions now, Mr. Dictator. After 17 long years I thank

God for making it possible for me to return home and to share the fruits of exile with my fellow Gambians. It was with boundless love for Gambia that the essays in the book were written. And it is with boundless love for Gambia that they are now being shared with more members of our Family Nation. It is with a profound sense of gratitude that I say to all who contributed to the defeat of the Jammeh dictatorship, “thank you and God bless you all.”

God bless The Gambia, the Smiling Coast of West Africa.

*Baba Galleh Jallow
Philadelphia
23 April 2017*

Introduction

The Dictator

That dictators are essentially paranoid is a fairly well-known fact. Feeding on public insecurity and fear, the dictator is supremely insecure and fearful. There is not a single moment of a dictator's life when they are not preoccupied with their personal security, when they do not imagine daggers lurking in the dark shadows of their mind, waiting for an opportunity to pounce and stab them to death. The dictator perpetually mistakes the bogeys and demons conjured by their paranoid mind with the realities of life. This makes them feel perpetually defensive and hostile. Because they feel that every brutal action they take is legitimately taken in self-defence and self-preservation, the dictator manages to stifle their conscience and justify the most senseless of tyrannies inflicted upon their perceived enemies. The dictator is always under siege, not necessarily by any hostile forces, but by the siege mentality lodged in their paranoid mind and threatening to annihilate them every single moment of the day. They are an inmate of Schein's "Psychic prison" that prevents them "from seeing old problems in a new light or finding more promising ways to work on perennial challenges" (2010: 7).

The dictator is therefore a very miserable creature, perhaps the most miserable of all creatures. Surrounded by power, they feel utterly powerless. The fact that their power is limited by the very reality of life represents a painful regret in their heart. The fact that reality dictates that they cannot possibly know everything that's going on sharpens their obsession with needing to know everything that's going on. This explains why the dictator inevitably creates a network of informers who feed them with all manner of information and misinformation, all of which are taken to be gospel truths and used as the basis of actions whose consequences are never adequately considered. Ironically, the more they "know" or fail to know about what's going on, the more powerless and paranoid they feel, and the more they insist on knowing everything that's going on. This explains why they try to regulate what people say on the phone, who they see on Skype, what messages are sent by electronic or surface mail, what meetings are held in distant cities, what's going on in social media and who is glancing at their portrait with unfriendly eyes. To assuage their oppressive paranoia, the dictator publicly proclaims that they know everything that's going on, everything that their enemies are saying, and everything that they are doing and thinking. In reality, the dictator feels perpetually empty and painfully ignorant and limited; a fact that further drives them into the desperate antics of a clueless leader.

Surrounded by security, the dictator feels supremely vulnerable and exposed. Their obsession with being a supreme being is perpetually frustrated by the reality of their mortality. The realization that the invincibility they hanker after is simply beyond the reach of mortal beings lurks in the thick dark jungle of their mind like a deadly serpent waiting to bury its fangs into their soul. The dictator's delusional mind is crowded by poisonous reptiles, monster scorpions, blood-

thirsty predators, infectious substances and harmful organisms of all kind. This explains why they are perpetually in search of defensive mechanisms in magic portions, amulets, prayers, blessings, and concoctions to protect them from the imagined monsters in their minds that pose imagined threats to their security. This explains why they habitually turn upon their personal security detail with allegations of coup plots and conspiracies, arrests, detentions, killings, sackings, transfers, redeployments and all manner of ploys to destabilize all potential threats to their security. This explains why they are so obsessed with riding in bullet proof Hummers and building bunkers and seemingly impenetrable walls around their residences. Feeding on the insecurity of their people, the dictator is the most insecure of all people. Happiness perpetually eludes them like a mirage in the desert. Brief moments of pleasure are interspersed with extended periods of inexplicable rage and a crippling sense of dread that makes them feel like a badly wounded wolf ready to tear into pieces anything that comes within a mile of their person.

Under a dictatorship the frontiers between penal and non-penal deeds are totally effaced. The law becomes not an instrument for the punishment of criminals, or an institution for the maintenance of peaceful order, but a bogey for the frightening of populations and a sword for the slaughter of principles and human dignities. In their crippling insecurity and insatiable greed for power and immortality, the dictator turns the law into a malignant instrument of remote control and surveillance in the service of their callous despotism. The law watches out for wrong smiles on the faces of people looking at an image of the dictator, listens to wrong words spoken in reference to the dictator, browses the pages of journals for wrong words directed at the person of the dictator, and is trampled and spat upon whenever and wherever it threatens to obstruct the objectives of the dictator. In every case, the law, now transformed into a monstrous public enemy number one, is poised to pounce on perceived offenders and tear them into shreds for the benefit of the dictator, who becomes more of an inhuman behemoth than a public official accountable to their country and people.

The dictator's obsession with exercising total and absolute control over all affairs of the country causes them to by-pass all legitimate institutions of the state. Parallel to these legitimate institutions they invent a forest of structures and pseudo institutions and place them directly under their personal service. This explains why we see in a dictatorship the sudden mushrooming of secret police units, personal militia groups and death squads that operate outside the ambit of the Interior and Defence ministries. We see youth wings and party zealots loyal and answerable to every whim and caprice of the dictator. We see religious leaders whose loyalties lie not with the dictates of their professed faiths, but with the dictates of their patron tyrants. All these institutions and individuals come to constitute a shadow state through which the dictator feels at liberty to perform and exercise their illegitimate authority. Where it proves impossible to create parallel institutions, the dictator assumes the power to hire and fire cronies and stooges beholden only to their personal whims and caprices.

In a dictatorship, society is reduced to a giant masquerade of lies and pretences. All who wish to survive are compelled to keep their minds dormant and their

mouths shut. People are compelled to deny their true opinions and express only fake opinions in praise of the dictator. An atmosphere of general insecurity and mistrust prevails in work places and public spaces because unprincipled liars make it dangerous to express any opinions that are not complimentary of the dictator. Unscrupulous and callous individuals take advantage of the high premium placed on sycophancy and lying to cook up stories of subversion against innocent folks and deliver them up to the power-hungry tyrant. Jealous individuals eyeing top positions have their colleagues removed by telling lies about them to the dictator. Friend is turned against friend, brother against brother, sister against sister, family against family in the service of the dictator's insatiable lust for power. Crippled by paranoia, the dictator struts around disguised in the drab robes of fearless bravado.

The dictator classifies the society they lord it over into two distinct factions. Those who negate their humanity, ignore truth and justice, willfully lie, torture and kill innocent individuals are considered the good and the loyal. Those who cling on to their humanity, who insist on telling the truth, who speak up for justice, who refuse to lie and refuse to crawl on their stomachs like miserable reptiles are considered the criminal elements. Society is stood directly on its head: Truth becomes lies, lies truth. Injustice struts around as justice, and justice is spat upon as injustice. Law-abiding citizens are routinely criminalized and punished, while criminal elements are glorified and elevated to the status of patriots and paragons of virtue. The law is rendered an instrument of illegality and criminality. For a classical example of the perfect dictator, see Gambia's Yahya Jammeh. The essays in this book are a clear message to the dictator that not all voices can be silenced, that the truth can be hushed but never extinguished, and that as history has shown again and again, however long they reign supreme, dictatorships will fall into the dustbin of history.

PART ONE
THE MANY FACES OF DICTATORSHIP
The more you look, the less you see

1

Deconstructing Yahya Jammeh (1)

In a speech delivered after he returned to Banjul following a foiled coup attempt against his regime on December 29, 2014, Gambian ruler Yahya Jammeh said, among other things, that “Those who advocate and sponsor violence for regime change should know that they are not only acting in violation of the human rights and legitimate interests of those affected, but it is also against the will of the Almighty Allah.” What a great paradox that Yahya Jammeh, who disparaged and dismissed the very idea of human rights barely a week earlier, would now talk about “the violation of the human rights” of those affected, namely, him. Has Mr. Jammeh forgotten that back in 1994, he advocated and sponsored violence for regime change when he forcefully overthrew the government of Sir Dawda Jawara? Did it only occur to him within the past few days that overthrowing a government through the barrel of the gun represented a “violation of the human rights and the legitimate interests of those affected”? Come on Mr. Jammeh, a brick does not become a brig just because you call it so!

The violent attempt to overthrow Mr. Jammeh did not come as a surprise to close observers of the Gambian situation. In spite of Jammeh’s denials over Gambian dissatisfaction, and in spite of the fact that he has repeatedly won “elections” in 1996, 2001, 2006 and 2011, the reality is that Jammeh’s government is brutally repressive of dissidents, that he has completely monopolized the political space to the exclusion of everyone else, and that his critics and opponents are on the re-

ceiving end of an alarming politics of exclusion which treats them as if they have no right whatsoever to question or criticize their own government. Since 1994, freedoms of expression and association have been systematically denied Gambian citizens. News media houses have been subjected to arson attacks (*Radio IFM*, *The Independent* newspaper), confiscated by the government (*Citizen FM*), and banned without explanation (*The Independent*). Journalists have been arrested, often tortured and jailed for varying lengths of time without warrants, without charges and without the slightest respect for their human rights or the rule of law. They have been murdered in drive-by shootings (Deyda Hydara), or made to disappear without trace (Chief Ebrima Manneh), or forced into exile for expressing legitimate opinions on issues of national concern. Does Jammeh want to tell us that ALL Gambians are happy with these rampant human rights abuses, including the brutal gunning down of unarmed, peacefully demonstrating school children on 10-11 April 2000?

If only a handful of Gambians are dissatisfied with his record as president of The Gambia, natural justice requires that their dissatisfaction be given full legitimate expression. So please stop claiming that Gambians are totally satisfied with your record as if Gambians were a single monolith, a single individual who is totally beholden to you. A critical mass of Gambians knows that Jammeh has failed in many crucially important respects, they are dissatisfied, and they will say so whether Jammeh likes it or not. That is simply the nature of the constitutional, rights-bound political dispensation called the Republic of The Gambia which belongs to Jammeh as much as it belongs to the poorest beggar in Banjul or the most criminally-minded felon at Mile Two Prison. Citizenship is an irreducible commodity equally shared by all citizens. It is also an inalienable right that may not be, that cannot be forcefully denied by the most tyrannical of regimes. Sovereignty rests with the people and cannot be taken away under the most repressive of regimes simply because it is a spirit that is untouchable and unreachable by the walls of a prison, the lashes of the police or the bullets of the killer squad. And it may not, cannot be monopolized by any single individual, however powerful they feel.

Gambian opposition parties have to seek police permission, which is often denied, in order to hold rallies and address their supporters. Gambian government ministers, civil servants, and military personnel are sacked and often arrested and jailed without the slightest explanation as to what crimes they had committed against the laws of The Gambia or for the most trivial of non-reasons, at the personal whims of Jammeh. As we write, some prominent Muslim elders are being held in jail and tried in a lawless "court of law" for performing their religious ceremony at the moment they believed was the most appropriate for it, because Jammeh had ordered the entire country to perform this ceremony on a particular day. To add insult to injury, a lot of Gambian courts are now manned by Nigerian judges and magistrates (commonly known as mercenary judges) some of whom are of dubious legal credentials and some of whom do whatever they think Jammeh would like them to do. So there is a lot of dissatisfaction among Gambians, civilian and military, and one can safely predict that since constitutionally mandated avenues of change are virtually closed in Jammeh's Gambia, more violent

attempts to overthrow his repressive regime will happen because Jammeh will not start respecting the rights of Gambians anytime soon. The only human right he recognizes is his “right” to rule the country for as long as he possibly can, for a “billion years” as he likes to put it, because he is totally insensitive to the virtue of political sharing of the state that nature imposes upon him. The Almighty Allah he likes so much to cite frowns upon injustice of any kind, especially of the kind inflicted on their own people by power-drunk rulers like Jammeh. He certainly can take that to Allah’s bank.

Jammeh’s reference to “the violation of the human rights of affected individuals” (himself), as in the quote above, is part of a bigger aspect of his selective appropriation of the institutions and structures of the nation-state system. He cites human rights or the rule of law only under two particular circumstances: One, when it suits his personal interests to do so, as in the quote above. And two, when he blames the West for allegedly meddling in the affairs of what he considers his personal country. He ignores constitutional provisions whenever they clash with his personal interests and cites them whenever they serve his personal interests. This pattern points to an extremely selfish political character common to insecure dictators everywhere. It also demonstrates Jammeh’s tendency to pose as the very personification of the Gambian nation-state. For example, a couple of weeks ago when he was asked in a TV interview why he criticizes the West when they assist The Gambia in the building of roads etc., Jammeh blurted, among other incoherencies:

“Where did they help us? They are not helping me. If the West refunds to Africa what they have looted for the past 400 years plus 25% interest... They are not giving us any aid. They are giving us something that is infinitesimal compared to what they have taken from us. So they are not giving me any aid. They are not making me any favours. Let them give back to me what they have taken for 400 years and see whether I will ask them for anything. They are not giving me aid. In fact that is even an insult. If you take a bull and give me only the horns and you tell me you are helping me...that is an insult.”

In the above paragraph, Jammeh freely moves from “us” to “me” as if us (Gambia) and me (Jammeh) are one and the same entity. The idea of “I am the state” is a common staple of power-drunk dictators. They get so mentally blinded by power that they lose the ability to see themselves as individuals separate from the institutional character of the state. Another extreme example of this tendency was greatly inflated in Mobutu Sese Seko, with whom Jammeh shares a striking mental resemblance. When at the height of his power Mobutu was asked about his vast fortune as head of state of a poor country like Zaire, he shot right back at the journalist: “Is this what you call fortune? What about the fortune King Leopold of Belgium stole from us? What about the fortune the Belgian colonialists stole from us?” (See the documentary, *Mobutu: Roi du Zaire*). Also, when he founded his Popular Movement for the Revolution (MPR) Mobutu insisted that all citizens of Zaire – dead, alive and unborn – were part of his party. Not to support the MPR literally meant total exclusion from the space of Zairean citizenship. Like Jammeh, Mobutu practised a virulent politics of exclusion which was the cardinal practice

of the colonial regimes they like to blame for their extremely damaging political blunders. Jammeh goes even further by equating himself with Africa because the so-called and totally non-existent 400 years of colonial rule and the billions the West stole from us did not come from what we know as The Gambia alone. In fact, the entity called Gambia is a relatively recent entity in African history. It is certainly not 400 years old.

Jammeh knows that he no longer really enjoys political legitimacy both in his own mind and in the reality of Gambian political history. He will of course deny the fact in public; but deep in his mind, he knows that he has no moral authority to be president of The Gambia 20 years after he promised to step down only after a two-year transition period and twenty years after he declared that “in fact, ten years is too much” for anyone to stay in power after his solemn, God-witnessed oath to make sure that there are term limits in the new Gambian constitution. As a Gambian, Jammeh had the right to contest the presidency in 1996 like everyone else. But he has no right to occupy the institution of the Gambian presidency as if it is his own personal domain, to the exclusion of everyone else, and to declare insultingly to anyone who cares to listen that “he will rule the Gambia for a billion years.” He certainly would, if he could. Fortunately, he cannot rule the country for even a hundred years simply because he will not live that long or if he does, he would have been so old and shriveled, so physically depleted that he could not don his grand boubous and drag himself, his sword and his worry beads around anymore. So he is just being characteristically rude and contemptuous of Gambians when he brags that he will rule The Gambia for a billion years.

A couple of days after the December 29 incident, BBC journalists repeatedly asked me in an interview why people are trying to overthrow Jammeh violently when the Gambian people keep voting for him in presidential elections. This question is part of the almost normalized culture of political exceptionalism so common in Western political, social and media circles – the idea that in Africa, it is okay for one man to keep winning elections over and over and over again even though such a scenario may not even be contemplated in western countries, however popular or successful a leader is. The longer and more complex answer to why people like Jammeh keep winning elections in spite of their terrible leadership incapacities has to do with the nature of Gambian and by extension African political cultures, which have remained virtually unchanged from the precolonial period to date. Evidence of this political culture is displayed in the use of such terms as *Mansa Kunda* and its equivalents in other Gambian-African languages to describe constitutional governments, in the widespread belief that a *Mansa* (president) is appointed by God, and in the equally erroneous idea that to oppose a *Mansa* (president) is to oppose the will of God. In a similar vein, the majority of Gambians do not directly attribute their poverty and suffering to Yahya Jammeh or his government. If you ask the average villager in rural Gambia why they are poor, why they couldn’t afford money to send their children to school or buy a bag of rice, they will likely point to Allah rather than to the poor leadership and bad governance of Yahya Jammeh. And until and unless there is a radical transformation of this political culture which will bring it in line with the new constitutional

dispensation that rules their lives, many Gambians will continue voting for Jammeh. The sad reality is that free and fair elections in the true sense of the term are not possible within the context of our current political culture. We need a mind revolution that will politically empower Gambians and enable them to hold their leaders accountable and kick them out through the ballot box if they lose their political legitimacy. In the absence of an empowered people, dictators will continue to abuse our rights and justifiably angry people will continue attempting to remove them through the barrel of the gun.

But an unchanged political culture is just one side of the answer to the BBC's question as to why people keep electing Jammeh. The issue is really not whether Jammeh keeps winning elections. The issue is whether he should keep running for office in the first place, whether it is right and just for one man to monopolize the leadership of our country to the exclusion of all other citizens who have equal rights to lead the country if they so desire and if they get the popular mandate to do so. It is from this particular perspective that Jammeh no longer enjoys either the political or the moral legitimacy to remain head of state of The Gambia. Like I said, he might deny it all he likes in his public utterances. But deep inside his mind, he knows that his continued occupation of the Gambian presidency is illegitimate, since it is based on a lie he told the Gambian people 20 years ago; namely, that he will make sure that there is a presidential term limit of two five-year terms; that in fact - and these are his direct words - "ten years is too much" for any president to stay in power in The Gambia. Well, Mr. Jammeh, how about 20 years for too long?

Of course, it is a waste of time to ask Jammeh to reform his ways. Or to investigate the many brutal crimes against Gambians committed under his watch and often by his own orders. So we are left with the sad realization that as violence has been used in the past to try kicking him out of power, so will violence be used again, and again, and again for the same purpose of kicking him out of power. So we brace ourselves for inevitable bloodshed in our dear country and pray only that the casualties be as minimal as possible.

(2 January 2015)

2

Deconstructing Yahya Jammeh (2)

In the last three months of 2014, Yahya Jammeh gave orders that the titles Nasiru Deen and Babili Mansa be immediately dropped from his lengthy appellation of His Excellency the President of the Republic Sheikh Professor Alhaji Dr Yahya AJJJ Jammeh Nasiru Deen Babili Mansa. As usual, no explanation was given to the Gambian public for the strange but welcome titular excisions. Jammeh's habit of never giving any explanations for his actions – whether it is sacking some high government official or cutting his titles – is part of a lengthy pattern and culture of lack of accountability to the Gambian people. When he seized power in 1994, his mantra was Accountability, Transparency and Probity, three words that have since been relegated to the dustbin of his personal history because they suggested a certain limit to what he can do or say, which is by no means to be entertained.

And since we are left with no option but to scratch our brains and focus our probing search light into the thick undergrowth of his mind, we have been doing just that and will be forgiven for concluding that the advice to drop the two titles came from some wealthy Arab sultan. Like they say, in the absence of clear explanation from their leaders, citizens have no option but to find their own explanation for their leaders' actions. The one that makes most sense for us at this point in time is that Yahya Jammeh dropped Babili Mansa and Nasiru Deen from his titles because one of his wealthy donors in the Arab world gravely admonished him to drop them because they are unIslamic.

We imagine that Yahya Jammeh is visiting one of his newfound beneficiaries in some oil-rich Arab sultanate. Having totally alienated the western imperialists, his best friends are now the Arab imperialists who, by the way, were engaged in the African slave trade long before the westerners. Both the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade and the Indian Ocean Slave Trade were patronized by Arabs from the Near East and the Middle East from around 1000 – around 1800 CE, about 800 years. The existence of a black diaspora in Asia and the Near and Middle East indicates that Africans had been sent to these places as slaves long before the onset of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in the mid-1400s and early 1500s. That there were black slaves like Bilal in Mecca during the days of the Prophet Muhammad (May his name be blessed) points to the irrefutable fact that Arabs enslaved people of African descent as early as the 7th century after Christ, if not earlier. Historians of Africa know about the famous revolt of black slaves against the Abbasid Caliphate and their Arab Masters in Iraq - the Zanj Revolt – which happened between 869 and 883 CE. But well, being a selective “historian of Africa” Yahya Jammeh probably does not know about the Zanj Revolt and forces himself to forget about the Trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean Slave Trades; and so he condemns one group of African enslavers while embracing the older group of African enslavers. At least, the Arabs do not like to talk about democracy, human rights or the rule of law being, as they are, so enamoured of political absolutism and quietism. Anyway, back to his visit to our influential sultan, probably to seek some financial aid for his great project of Vision 2016 which promises total and abundant food self-sufficiency for our hungry population within two years. Another pie in the sky is what it looks to us.

At the palace of the wealthy sultan dinner had been served, roasted lamb topped with tasty Arab sauce and tamarind for dessert, washed down with pure camel milk from the sultan’s personal herd. His host the sultan, rather unhappy that his peace was being repeatedly disturbed by beggars from the dark continent, had secretly drowned a glass of custom brewed and scentless whiskey before joining his guest in an after dinner chat. Trying to impress his wealthy host, Yahya Jammeh launches into a tirade against the Western infidels who are insisting that all Gambians become homosexuals and gleefully relates how he would kill all of them because he was a Muslim and will never allow anyone to colonize his country again. Seeing that the sultan looked rather indifferent, Yahya Jammeh skillfully segues into a narrative of how he made sure that everyone – including the white infidels residing in his country – knew that he was making a private state visit to the sultan’s beautiful kingdom. He reaches for a copy of his favourite local newspaper and hands it to the sultan with the lead caption screaming, “Gambian Leader Pays Special Private Working Visit to His Eminence Sultan Al Arabi.” The first sentence of the story reads: “His Excellency the President of the Republic of The Gambia, Sheikh Alhaji Professor Dr. Yahya AJJJ Jammeh Nasiru Deen Babili Mansa is paying a special private working visit to His Eminence Sultan Al Arabi bin Mahfooz bou Salasi fii Haqi of the great Kingdom of Mullah’anal. He watched as the Sultan’s face darkened and his forehead folded into quizzical wrinkles as he read on. Presently, the sultan looked up with serious eyes.

“So what is meaning of this word Babil Mansa? What is all this?” he asks his guest.

Yahya Jammeh dutifully chuckles and offers an explanation.

“Oh, Babili Mansa. It means the king who builds bridges. My people gave it to me a few years ago when I built a bridge that the western infidels and exploiters failed to build after 400 years of colonial rule.”

“Is Babil king or Mansa king? What is king, which one? What is Babil in your people? In my language Babil means father; in traditional Arab language. You build bridge they call you father of king?” The whiskey was taking effect and the sultan was just ready to say exactly what was on his mind to this black beggar. “This word Mansa, what it means, huh?”

“Oh Mansa means king,” Yahya Jammeh explains. “Before the white infidels came to my country our kings were called Mansa. And because I want to take my people back to the days when there were no infidels, they now call me Mansa.”

“But that was old days, the days of jahilliya, before infidel come to your country, before Islam come to your country they call your king Mansa,” the sultan pursues. “I don’t like this word Mansa. Not sound good.”

“Ah well yes,” Yahya Jammeh tries to explain. “Our kings were called Mansa in the old days...”

The sultan cuts him short.

“Mansa? Then Mansa haram because it was before Islam. If they call you Babil Mansa it is haram in my language because it means Father of Haram. You must tell them to stop calling you this name. Islam does not like. And what is this one Nasiru Deen? What it means?”

Taken aback by the sultan’s bluntness, Jammeh feels squeezed but manages to assure his host that he would make sure that they don’t call him that anymore. Before he has time to say anything else, the sultan, who is now pretty tipsy and ready to go, continues.

“In my language Nasiru Deeny means helper of religion. Why they call you this?”

“Well some of my Imams gave me this title because they say I help Islam in my country.”

“But Allah says in Quran that if you help with right hand left hand not see. So why they call you this? If you help Islam with right hand, left hand no see.”

Yahya Jammeh gravely nodded his agreement. The Quran does indeed say exactly that and he wondered why he did not think of it until now. And so he solemnly promised his host that he would make sure that his people stop calling him both Babili Mansa and Nasiru Deen. Hence the two press releases from the president’s office in the last few months of 2014 that everybody should drop the titles Babili Mansa and Nasiru Deen from Yahya Jammeh’s name.

When in 2013 Yahya Jammeh reduced The Gambia’s work week from five to four days without satisfactory explanation, we looked for one in his mind. You can read our take on that issue at the following link:

https://www.academia.edu/8312602/Gambia_Why_Sharia_is_not_an_option

(4 January 2015)

3

Deconstructing Yahya Jammeh (3)

The purpose of deconstructing Yahya Jammeh is not to merely criticize him, however justified such criticism is. Nor is the purpose simply to vent anger, however justifiable, at his systematic abuse of our rights and responsibilities as Gambian citizens. We deconstruct Yahya Jammeh to highlight the many contradictions that characterize his political character and his assertion of absolute power over Gambians while denouncing the absolute power of his colonial predecessors. We deconstruct Yahya Jammeh to demonstrate that Gambians have come of age, and that we will record his history for current and future generations of Gambians so that they will be empowered and never allow any single individual to abrogate their God-given rights of citizenship the way Yahya Jammeh has done for the past 20 years. We focus the limelight on his mind, thoroughly understand his mentality, and explain for the edification of the Gambian nation and anyone interested the mental anatomy of postcolonial African dictators. Since some of us are denied access to our National Archives and therefore the opportunity to write histories of The Gambia, we will work with the primary material in Yahya Jammeh's mind to which we have direct access through his words and actions, and write his history for our National Archives.

Yahya Jammeh denies Gambians their basic humanity by claiming that there

is no such thing as human rights or by equating human rights with alien western practices (unless of course when his own “human rights” are threatened by an armed insurrection like the one we saw on December 30, 2014; in which case he will ardently appeal to the notion of “the human rights and legitimate interests of the affected persons”). As we have repeatedly argued over the years, human rights are natural and universal, not Western, Eastern or African. Every human being is born with God-given inalienable rights that may not be abrogated under any circumstances, and may temporarily be suspended only under exceptionally legitimate circumstances, such as under a state of emergency. The natural function of human rights is to safeguard the dignity of the human person, and no westerner has a greater share of human dignity than any Gambian. All human beings are created equal and endowed with an equal level of dignity that is natural, human, and inalienable. To grant ownership of human rights to the West is to perpetuate the age-old myth and racist western exceptionalism that Africans are less than human. It is to prop up the very dehumanizing, racist and othering western discourses about Africans that Yahya Jammeh claims to be against. He is therefore sadly confused and bereft of rational logic when in trying to deny Gambians their rights as human beings deserving of dignity, he grants exclusive ownership of human rights to the West. This tragically sad behaviour betrays an inferiority complex on the part of Yahya Jammeh that spills over into a confused, illogical and self-deprecating ascription of more power and agency to the West than the West deserves or may ever lay claim to.

Yahya Jammeh likes to condemn and blame colonialism for not developing Africa. We have repeatedly argued that expecting colonialism to develop the colonized smacks of naivety if not outright foolery. The aims and objectives of colonialism were to subjugate and exploit, not to free and develop the colonized. To keep harping on how colonial rule did not develop The Gambia is a sign of ignorance about the reasons of Empire and the nature of historical reality. That said, and judging from his record in office, Yahya Jammeh’s regime is almost a carbon copy of the oppressive colonial state he so likes to fleece. In fact, Yahya Jammeh’s regime is more despotic in many respects than the colonial state. This is because while the colonial state unjustly oppressed “othered subjects” of Empire, his regime unjustly oppresses fully-fledged, indigenous and free citizens of an independent nation who share equal ownership of the country with him. Yahya Jammeh rules The Gambia like a colonial Leviathan who, unlike the original Hobbesian Leviathan, does not even depend on a covenant that guarantees him the people’s loyalty in exchange for their protection by an all-powerful state. Under him, The Gambia is a state of exception in which he arrogates to himself the power to decide who expresses their legitimate opinions, who deserves to be deprived of their private property, and who deserves to live or to die without any regard whatsoever to the laws of the land that he is sworn to uphold. Yet, Yahya Jammeh is a citizen like any other Gambian; he should respect the human rights of his fellow citizens just as he would like his human rights to be respected. There can be no selective appropriation of the right to enjoy human rights or any selective application of the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would like others to do unto you if

you were in their position.

One of the cardinal characteristics of Yahya Jammeh's regime is press censorship which incidentally, is a very colonial instrument of oppression. Censorship was the weapon colonial rulers used to silence African journalists and nationalists who protested colonial exploitation and the denial of the rights of colonized peoples. Its principal purpose was to silence those who would challenge the colonial rulers' "unjust right" to do as they pleased with African lives and properties. Its purpose was to prevent the generation of informed dissent and hatred for oppression among the colonized. Censorship was meant to prevent the "virus" of political awareness from infecting the mind of the colonized peoples. It was to prevent the kind of political enlightenment born of informed opinion that leaves no room for a state's oppression of its citizens. As a site for the production and dissemination of knowledge, the press represented a threat to colonial rulers whose interests lay in unquestioning obedience by an exploited and oppressed people. And it should be noted that the censorship laws deployed by the colonial state in Africa were obsolete and long discarded laws in their own countries. Laws from 19th century Britain were used by British colonial rulers to silence dissent in 20th century Africa, a fact that revealed how for the colonial state, African colonies were spaces of exception and otherness that could be treated in ways not acceptable or even conceivable in their own countries. Those same obsolete laws of 19th century Britain were further recycled and inflicted upon their own people by Yahya Jammeh and other postcolonial dictators in 21st century Africa.

The practice of using colonial laws in postcolonial spaces was particularly prominent in Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah, Kutu Acheampong and Jerry Rawlings PNDC regime. The Emergency Powers Act, 1957 (the year of Ghanaian independence) was said by the Nkrumah government to be "in substitution for the Emergency Powers Order in Council, 1939." Nkrumah's Books and Newspapers Registration Act, 1961 was almost identical to the Books and Newspapers Registration Ordinance, 1894, and the Newspapers, Books and Printing Presses Ordinance, 1934. Acheampong's Newspaper Licensing Decree 1973, replicated the Newspaper Registration Ordinance, 1896, and the Books and Newspapers Registration Ordinance, 1897; Rawlings' Preventive Custody Law 1982 was similar to the Emergency Powers Order in Council, 1939; and the Newspaper Licensing Law, 1989 was almost an exact replica of the Books and Newspapers Registration Ordinance 1894, the Books and Newspapers Registration Ordinance 1897, and the Books and Printing Presses Ordinance 1934. This mind boggling use of draconian colonial laws in independent nation-state space suggests identical behavioral patterns and mindsets between colonial and postcolonial states and leaders in Africa.

One does not need to look very far to realize that like his Ghanaian counterparts, Yahya Jammeh muzzles freedoms of expression and of the press for the exact reasons colonial rulers muzzled them. In 1998, Yahya Jammeh invoked an old colonial law - the Telegraph Act of 1913/14 - to silence Citizen FM under the pretext that the media house was not registered under the long obsolete colonial law. If The Gambia gained independence in 1965, how could a Gambian media

house be expected to register under a colonial law of 1913/14? The reality was that Yahya Jammeh banned and confiscated Citizen FM because Baboucarr Gaye had the foresight to translate the content of Gambian newspapers – including the state-owned *Gambia Daily* – so that the majority of Gambians who could not read them could understand what was going on in their country. The resounding popularity of the immensely useful news translation programme could only frighten a regime hell bent on keeping its people in the dark about matters fundamentally affecting their lives and livelihoods. That the Telegraph Act of 1913/14 was used to silence *Citizen FM* throws into sharp relief Yahya Jammeh's colonial mentality and the colonial character of his regime and nullifies any moral authority he has to condemn colonial rule. Suffice it to note that in pre-colonial Africa, people were not denied the right to criticize and question the actions of their leaders. Knowledge was public property and issues of public interest were everyone's business. Democracy in its indigenous African forms subjected the will of the ruler to the collective will of the people and rulers were often removed from power if they crossed the boundaries of acceptable social etiquette and civility. Tyrants who habitually opposed and frustrated the will of the people or insulted their dignity were violently or otherwise removed from power, much like the many attempts that have been made since November 1994 to violently remove Yahya Jammeh from power.

It is therefore an insult to the human dignity of Gambians and Africans that Yahya Jammeh characterizes democracy as an exclusively Western form of governance. Democracy is simply the name in English for a very African and human practice that preceded the colonial encounter by many hundreds if not thousands of years. It is in fact a culture of universal civility common to civilizations from ancient China to ancient Mesopotamia, ancient Rome, ancient Greece and ancient Africa. Disregarding and silencing the legitimate opinions of Africans became the norm through censorship practices introduced by the colonial rulers and currently perpetuated by African rulers like Yahya Jammeh. Ironically these internal Africa colonial rulers pretend to be defenders of precolonial African cultures that knew no censorship. Yahya Jammeh condemns colonial rule but habitually behaves like a colonial ruler. There is such a thing as internal colonialism in situations where citizens are treated like colonial subjects without the right to question the activities of their government or otherwise express their legitimate political opinions. Our indigenous Gambian concepts and virtues of *moyaa* (being human) in Mandinka and *nitteh* (humaneness) in Wolof underpin the grave importance of civility and respect for human rights and dignity in traditional Gambian society. Not surprisingly, many Gambians today say of Yahya Jammeh that *amang ke moti or Kii du nit* (he is not human), a characterization that references his lack of *moyaa* or *nitteh* in the Gambian public's estimation.

Furthermore, the prison, the gun and the secret police – the greatest weapons of oppression in the arsenal of Yahya Jammeh – are direct products and legacies of colonial rule. These coercive instruments upon which Yahya Jammeh depends for his personal security and which he uses to abrogate the rights of free Gambian citizens are among the many “invented traditions” and “imported artifacts”

of colonialism in Africa. Mile Two Prison, Yahya Jammeh's self-declared five-star hotel, was built by colonial rulers; it did not exist in precolonial Gambia. Armies existed in precolonial Africa for the purpose of guarding the security of the people, which was not totally coterminous to the security of the ruler as it is in today's Gambia. Guns, especially the canon and the machine gun that surround Yahya Jammeh in his residences and public appearances everywhere, were imported into Africa by colonial rulers. They were the same weapons used to subjugate Africans and bring them under the control of colonial rulers. Under Yahya Jammeh guns continue to serve the function of subjugating Gambians and keeping them under the suffocating control of his regime. Institutions like the National Intelligence Agency are virulent reincarnations of secret police outfits deployed by colonial rulers and fascist regimes in Italy, Germany and other western countries. Hitler's regime, Mussolini's regime, Stalin's regime, Pinochet's regime, the regimes of the most brutal dictators of modern world history made use of secret police and ubiquitous informers to spy upon and oppress their citizens. Secret police did not exist in precolonial Africa and are not needed in free societies like Gambia without any threatening external enemies. In effect, Yahya Jammeh is at once defined and protected from political accountability by the same weapons that defined and protected colonial rulers from political accountability. Yet, at every possible opportunity, he vehemently condemns colonialism for not developing Africa and the West for talking to him about democracy and human rights. Surely Mr. Jammeh, we have our own democracy and human rights, like human societies everywhere? Only that you are not practising our own democracy and human rights, which is as good as anybody else's. Again, remember, Mr. Jammeh that colonialism does not necessarily have to be externally imposed. There is such a thing as internal colonialism of the kind imposed by your self-confessed dictatorship on free Gambian citizens. Some Gambians support you; some Gambians oppose you. Both types of Gambians should be free to support or oppose you without fear or favour. That is African democracy at its best.

(12 January 2015)

4

Good dictators, Mr. Kaplan?

In a strange piece published on the Stratfor website on 16 October 2013, Robert D. Kaplan tried to make a case that not all dictatorships are bad; that there are in fact “good” dictators. Why? Because some dictators, while having murdered tens of thousands of their own people through tortures, disappearances, extrajudicial executions and mass massacres, still managed to create a degree of economic prosperity for their countries. Mr. Kaplan makes the case that calling all dictators dictators over-simplifies complex realities; he confidently argues that some dictators are actually good dictators. But they are still dictators right, Mr. Kaplan? And to repeat the question you posed and which serves as the title of your piece: what is a dictator? Well, here’s our answer: a dictator is a tyrannical ruler who, like Gambia’s Yahya Jammeh, tortures and kills his own people, causes untold misery to innocent men, women and children, and practically assumes ownership of his country to the exclusion of everyone else. A dictator is a criminal in power who hijacks entire populations and clings on to power for as long as he can. A dictator, in short, is evil incarnate; or to put it in more straightforward terms: a dictator is a personification of evil. There is no such thing as a good dictator or, as Jammeh likes to call himself, “a dictator for development.” Dictatorship runs counter to the grain of human nature and is therefore both counter-productive and doomed

to failure.

Rationalizing dictatorship may be motivated by good intentions, but never comes out right in spite of its author's good intentions. Robert Kaplan may not mean any harm in asking and trying to answer the question, what is a dictator? But he certainly misses the point of dictatorship, which is that no one has a right to be a dictator and that the achievements of dictators like Pinochet and others of his ilk are not a necessary consequence of their being dictators, but a combination of enabling factors that would have produced the same effects in the absence of dictatorship within that particular spatial and temporal context. The idea of "good dictatorship" is a serious contradiction in terms and may not be legitimately justified by any stretch of the imagination.

Clearly, Mr. Kaplan measures the wellbeing of the societies whose dictators he praises purely in terms of material welfare, the reduction of poverty levels, economic growth, and related indices highlighted by international financial institutions. Against these material indices of welfare are pitted the millions of lives lost by fiat of brutal tyrants like Pinochet in Chile. Against these material indices are pitted thousands of cases of unlawful arrest and torture of innocent citizens who dared to question the actions of their leaders in countries under Kaplan's "good" dictators and in Jammeh's Gambia. Against these material indices are pitted the sad fact that potentially world-saving creative energies have been and continues to be strangled to death under so-called "good" dictators. Against these material indices are pitted the fact that the fate and futures of millions of innocent men, women, children and unborn generations have been and continue to be mortgaged in the name of "good" dictatorship. Dictatorship is never good Mr. Kaplan, which is why it is inconceivable in western parts of the world.

Perhaps Mr. Kaplan should ask himself whether he would rather have a good dictator than a bad accountable president in his own country. Would Mr. Kaplan exchange his freedom of expression and of association with all the wealth in the world? Would Mr. Kaplan surrender his right to criticize his government and cast his vote for a candidate of his choice in free and fair elections for all the money in the world? How would Mr. Kaplan feel about being arbitrarily arrested, tortured, and jailed without charges or trial for merely disagreeing with the government of his own country like many Gambians? How would Mr. Kaplan feel if the president of the United States or the British Prime Minister decided that he would no longer respect presidential term limits, that he would not step down from office, and that he would govern his country for as long as he is alive like President Jammeh does? Would he still call them good dictators because of the material prosperity of their countries?

No amount of do-goodism justifies political tyranny, Mr. Kaplan. No amount of Chinese material prosperity justifies the massacre of protesters at Tiananmen Square in 1989. Calling dictators what they are, is not an over simplification of complex realities. It is as simple as calling Mr. Kaplan Mr. Kaplan. One cannot but agree with scholars of ethical leadership that leaders do not and cannot have the moral authority to break the rules that govern their status as leaders. Dictators like Yahya Jammeh habitually insult the intelligence of their people by stamping

their feet upon constitutional provisions, by assuming a monopoly of truth and the right to express their opinions on matters that are the collective concern of all citizens of their countries. Their supposed economic achievements pale in significance compared to the harm they inflict on their countries and peoples. And when one day their dictatorship ends – as it surely must – whatever material success they scored might be shattered by the storm that generally follows upon the heel of an enforced peace of the iron grid. Yes we know what dictatorship is, Mr. Kaplan: it is the worst form of government the world has ever known and will ever know; and it can never be justified by the greatest of economic miracles, especially since these economic miracles happen in spite of rather than because of dictatorship.

(17 October 2013)

5

Jammeh speaking truth, Mr. Jones?

It is sometimes hard to avoid reacting to the words of people who make statements not out of any particular knowledge beyond their narrow professional occupations, not out of reasonable familiarity with the situations they address, but simply as a consequence of their ideological positions and within their narrow political contexts. Moreover, the fight against injustice necessarily entails a corresponding fight against those who, wittingly or unwittingly, aid and abet injustice. The recent statement to the Iran-based Press TV by Bill Jones of the UK-based Executive Intelligence Review that Gambian dictator Yahya Jammeh spoke “truth to power” in accusing the UK and US of plotting to overthrow his government smacks of the age-old condescension that Western experts betray when talking about Africa and African issues. Is it not ironic that Mr. Jones uses the same “imperialistic” language that Jammeh habitually rants against to defend Jammeh? How does Mr. Jones know that Jammeh was speaking the “truth” in accusing the UK and the U.S. of trying to overthrow his government? What evidence did Jammeh provide to convince Mr. Jones that he was not lying?

Does Mr. Jones know how Jammeh reacts to people speaking truth to his power? Does Mr. Jones know whether Jammeh is in fact a believer in the idea and legitimacy of speaking truth to power? Does Mr. Jones know how many people

Jammeh has jailed, killed, exiled, and caused to disappear without the due process of law? Is Mr. Jones suggesting that Jammeh has the legitimate right to be in power for twenty years? Would Mr. Jones support the practice of indefinite one-man rule or sit-tight dictatorship in his own country? Would Mr. Jones support the practice of arrest and indefinite detention of citizens without charge or trial in his own country? Clearly, Mr. Jones' answers to these questions have to be either "no" or "I don't know". Government practices that are unthinkable in countries like Mr. Jones' are considered unproblematic in African countries. Does this not strongly suggest the kind of arrogant western exceptionalism that characterized the early colonial encounters and remains a key feature of Western perceptions of the other to this day? We Africans have serious issues with certain elements of Western society; but we defy anyone to treat Africa as if it is inhabited by savage races that have no right to the kinds of rights and freedoms enjoyed by Western citizens. We totally and absolutely condemn as utterly ignorant and totally reject the bogus notion that human rights, the rule of law and democracy are exclusive preserves of the West that cannot be "imposed" on the rest of us. Human beings are human beings to the extent that they recognize and respect the humanity of all other human beings. Men and women who strut about with presumptions of their superiority over others simply because of their skin colour are at best ignorant, at worst, inhuman. If dictatorship is unacceptable in the west, it is equally unacceptable in Africa. In which case Mr. Jones simply has no right to go about defending an African despot against other powers, however despotic those powers may be.

Jammeh accuses the UK and US of funding the November 11, 1994 revolt by Lt. Basiru Barrow and his colleagues. What specific evidence does Jammeh produce to back up his allegations? He accuses the UK and US of funding the UDP? What specific evidence does he produce to back up his allegations? He justifies these unsubstantiated allegations by claiming that these two Western countries are mad at him because they want to exploit Gambia's oil and mineral resources. What oil? What mineral resources? Does Jammeh think that Gambians in this day and age will just swallow his words and take them for the truth? If he does, he must be kidding himself. Gambians will scrutinize and analyze every single syllable that falls from his mouth, even accidentally. They will peer beneath the surface and reveal the deceptive and unspoken motives for his words and his actions. And they will throw them right into the open and expose them for what they are.

Conspiracy theories like the ones Mr. Jammeh utters about Western plots to overthrow his government are manifestations of the political paranoia afflicting all dictators rather than any depiction of reality. Mr. Jones is right that Jammeh should be concerned, especially in the light of America's clearly unreasonable demands in the document that he had published in the media. Why would the United States literally ask to have a totally free hand in operating within Gambian territory? Well, because the United States reserves the right to protect her national and security interests from those who would threaten it. If indeed that document is authentic, it is safe to suggest that there might be some evidence that Jammeh is aiding and abetting what America considers "terrorist groups" who are out to hurt the United States. At the very least, there might be "terrorists" operating in

The Gambia, whether or not Jammeh is aware of their presence. The presence of “terrorists” in The Gambia is not an unlikely scenario given Jammeh’s unhidden hatred of the United States and his frequent but groundless protestations of Islamic piety. We have argued over and over again that Jammeh is not a Muslim in the first place principally because the uncouth words he utters, the evil acts he perpetrates against innocent people and the occult activities he engages in are contrary to the spirit of Islam. But, of course, evil people do not know that they are evil. And since God does not tell anyone that they are evil, wrong or deluded, people like Jammeh could ceaselessly rant about being friends of Allah and even kill in the name of Allah. Just like Jammeh reserves the right to protect what he sees as his personal interests, so does the United States, any other nation, or person for that matter reserves the right to protect their own interests. If indeed the Americans have credible evidence that Jammeh is supporting people out to harm the United States, well then, all’s well that ends well.

Indeed, the UK and the US would be doing the hostage Gambian nation a great favour if they were to help end Jammeh’s reign of terror over innocent Gambians. The Gambian nation is today held hostage by a tyrannical regime headed by a psychopath who believes that the country is his personal property to do with as he likes. Hostage taking, even of an individual, is a crime that deserves to be punished. It is high time that the world re-evaluated its concept of hostage taking to include holding entire nations hostage to the whims and caprices of a dictator whose primary motivation is power for power’s sake. And the likes of Mr. Jones should do their homework before opening their big mouths and compounding the problems of innocent millions suffering under the weight of selfish dictatorships.

(14 October 2013)

6

Jammeh's way

Occasionally, the excesses of a dictatorship get so outrageous that people get tongue-tied as to what else to say. How do we make sense of a consistently senseless pattern of behaviour of a man who prides himself in going his own way, even if that way is patently self-destructive and destructive of so many innocent lives? The unfolding drama in Banjul over the Jammeh regime's murder of Solo Sandeng and its subsequent arrest of UDP (United Democratic Party) leader Ousainou Darboe and members of his party executive is revealing. The saying that fools hang themselves when you give them a long rope may be manifesting in Jammeh's determination to deal with this sensitive situation the only way he could possibly think of – with heavy handed insensitivity. Rather than manage the situation sensibly by allowing Gambians to protest peacefully and go home peacefully from the very start, Yahya Jammeh has ignited and is fueling a firestorm that would hopefully consume his tyrannical regime and rid our dear country of a political cancer that has been spreading in its body for the past 22 years.

Apologists for the regime's blatant injustices have argued that members of the UDP had broken the law by not seeking a police permit to hold their peaceful call for electoral reform and subsequent demands for an explanation as to what hap-

pened to Solo Sandeng. That law would have deserved respect in an environment of law and order – an environment where the police and security forces are not mere appendages of a callous dictatorship. In the Gambian situation, the police have repeatedly denied requests by the UDP and other legitimate applicants for permits to hold peaceful rallies for the simple reason that Mr. Jammeh does not approve of them. The idea of seeking permission to hold protests and rallies is legitimate only under a system characterized by respect for human rights and the rule of law. In a situation of utter disregard for human rights and the rule of law, it is well within the rights of the citizens to go right ahead and hold their peaceful protests and rallies without suffering the pain and indignity of applying only to be refused their constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of expression. Let the unjust regime eat its heart out or do its worst. Moreover, if the ruling party needs no permit to hold its rallies, why should any other legitimate political party or group of citizens need any such permit to express their legitimate public opinion? The idea behind permits is merely to inform the police so they could provide security and maintain order while the protests unfold. In Jammeh's Gambia, protests are considered privileges that may or may not be granted and enjoyed by the citizens as the government – which is to say the head of state – wishes.

By trying to prevent people from even attending the court hearings of Mr. Darboe and Co., the Jammeh dictatorship is finally completing the process of political suicide it started back in 1994. The more it bullies people who choose to attend the hearings, the more people find the bullying and insults they have been subjected to for the past two decades unbearable. Jammeh had always banked upon the notion that Gambians were cowards who were so afraid of dying or going to jail that they would take everything and leave everything in the hands of God. That is precisely what the dictatorship hopes would happen again. But this time around, things are likely to get out of hand because the UDP-inspired crisis happens at a point in the country's history when people are sick and tired of the suffocating stranglehold of the Jammeh regime. Thus, rather than drive people into their customary silence and passivity, the bullying will elicit exactly the opposite reaction. More people will get emboldened, more outraged and more determined to insist that The Gambia does not belong to Yahya Jammeh and his security forces – that it is a mutually owned and mutually shared home for all Gambians regardless of party affiliation or status. And the harder the regime cracks down upon the people, the larger the crowds are likely to grow.

Of course, the bottom line is that Jammeh has long been a victim of hubris – which is the fate of all tyrants and demagogues in history. For over two decades, hubris has rendered him deaf to the voice of reason and blind to the light of truth. He has doggedly chosen ignorance over knowledge, darkness over light, injustice over justice, and truth over lies. Hubris has caused him to commit heresy and utter such blasphemies like “I will rule The Gambia for a billion years” – a statement he knows to be manifestly false and against the natural laws of the God who created him and his power. Hubris has caused him to ignore exhortations to observe justice in dealing with the human beings under him, to allow Gambians to enjoy their God-given rights, and among many other things, not to attempt imposing Sharia

law on the Gambian people. In “Gambia: Why Sharia is not an option” (2013) we outlined the many reasons why it was a very bad idea for Jammeh to attempt imposing Sharia law on The Gambia, one of which was that people – Muslims and Christians alike – would kick back against the idea. But, of course, being afflicted with blinding hubris, his arrogance wouldn’t stop itching until he proved all his critics wrong. He had to show that his critics always lie about him; that, in fact, he could do whatever he wanted to do with our country and its entire people. Now we have seen the backlash against his ill-fated declaration of The Gambia as an Islamic state in the fact that current protesters include people carrying banners saying “no to an Islamic state” among other manifestations of refusal to comply. Scanning the crowds of protesters, one notices a few women wearing the veil, which they perhaps wore before the Islamic state crap, and one notices women wearing their traditional head dress or no head dress at all.

Now “the genie is out of the bottle” as one writer recently put it. The spell of fear is broken. Jammeh has reached what we may call “beyond crisis point”. The only way he can go now is down and out. Whatever the outcome of the current UDP case, Jammeh is doomed to historical infamy and notoriety. He joins tyrants and demagogues like Adolf Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Muamar Gaddafi, Augusto Pinochet, Pol Pot, Idi Amin, Sanni Abacha, Jean Bedel Bokassa and all the evil dictators and tyrants in history’s hell. He has willfully carved for himself a cold, perpetually nose-offending niche in the infamous dustbin of history where he, of course, will forever languish. He probably never heard Aristotle say “Man perfected by society is the best of all animals; he is the most terrible of all when he lives without law and without justice.” And he had refused to hear those who heard Aristotle convey the unassailable truth of the ages to his hubris-afflicted ears. Well, we just say all praise is to God, the Lord of Truth and Justice, to whom all power, belongs, now and forever.

(10 May 2016)

7

Fighting with himself: Jammeh versus his colonial mentality

African independence is questioned not only because of its tragi-comic performance as a mediocre imperial spectacle at which imperial power purports to grant “the status and dignity” of a nation to a former colony. African independence is mainly questioned because of the colonial mentality of African leaders. Ironically, these same leaders are engaged in a battle to the death with this colonial mentality that is internal to their own minds.

African leaders like Jammeh express their colonial mentality by engaging in an imaginary battle for independence sixty years after independence was celebrated. The battle is fought in the name of a hollow African nationalism or phantom pan-Africanism quite alien to current African realities. Since the colonial state that was the target of nationalist attack during the anti-colonial struggle no longer exists, the target of “nationalist” attack in this post-independence battle for independence is the African people. Anyone who disagrees with or does not share the leaders’ political views or dares to express their own political views is accused of having a colonial mentality. And in their pretext at defeating and destroying

this “evil” colonial mentality, African leaders like Jammeh distort and damage beyond repair the socio-cultural identity of their people in the most grotesque ways. They declare one party states; hold bogus referenda to change constitutions so they could perpetually hang on to power, even if millions of living and unborn people are destroyed in the process. They create fictional histories of colonial rule, willfully curb and diminish their people’s rights and human dignities, and impose a slew of unjust draconian laws and restrictions on their people – all in the name of fighting the colonial mentality. Ironically, African leaders like Jammeh are so obsessed with the colonial mentality precisely because it exists only in their own power-hungry minds.

His Excellency Sheikh Professor Dr. Alhaji Yahya AJJ Jammeh is one of the sorriest examples of African leaders fighting their own colonial mentality. Their condition is worse than trying to run away from their own shadows because unlike their shadows which are external to them, their colonial mentality is what defines them and inspires their every mindless action. Ironically, they could only understand their strange condition if they knew themselves. But if they knew themselves, they would not be afflicted with the colonial mentality and so would not be capable of the kind of callous politics they practise. Self-knowledge presupposes moral high ground that precludes the kind of flagrant political injustice inflicted upon their people by these leaders. Self-knowledge presupposes a level of empathy that does not permit naked aggression and mindless infliction of pain on one’s fellow beings. Because they do not know themselves, these leaders tragically and pointlessly continue to fight a battle that ended sixty years ago and in the process, they mindlessly destroy the lives of millions of innocent people, living and unborn. Mr. Jammeh’s practice of carrying a sword everywhere he goes is perhaps subconsciously indicative of his ongoing battle with his own colonial mentality. He is boxing with his own mind.

A curious aspect of Mr. Jammeh’s battle against the colonial mentality is that he never tells us what exactly this strange creature is. He expresses manufactured outrage against “400 years of colonialism”, even though he very well knows that those years are past and gone, never to return. He loudly laments in even more offended tones that during “400 years of colonialism” the West callously exploited Africa’s precious resources; but that too is only relevant as a lesson in history, even if this history is fictional history. In other words, Jammeh’s pretended outrage against the evils of colonialism has no practical value to present-day Gambians just like it serves no useful purpose to whine ceaselessly over milk spilt many decades ago. Mr. Jammeh also likes to swear that unlike some African leaders, he will never become a puppet of the West; but that surely is really beside the point. He can quietly refuse to be a puppet of the West (if in fact the West is interested in having him as a puppet) rather than abuse our sensibilities with all his fictional raving and ranting about refusing to be a puppet of the West. But beyond vehemently mouthing these specious justificatory irrelevancies, Yahya Jammeh never explains what exactly he means by the colonial mentality he is intent on banishing from the shores of Gambia.

And here is another expression of Jammeh’s colonial mentality: his battle against

the colonial legacy. At every possible opportunity, he loudly calls upon Gambians and Africans to get rid of the colonial legacy. However, he never tells us what exactly this colonial legacy looks like. One suspects that Jammeh knows very well that English, the very language he uses to fight the colonial legacy is perhaps the most useful colonial legacy in his personal arsenal of political weapons and tricks. One wonders what happened to his sworn threat to ban English in The Gambia. That would be a good starting point towards banishing the colonial legacy, even though he would then have to impose a new colonializing language on Gambians, be this Arabic or Russian. Is his attempt at imposing an Islamic state on Gambians a first step towards imposing Arabic as the country's official language? That would perhaps generate approving dollar nods from wealthy Arab sultans. But Arabic would still be an external, culturally colonizing language for Gambians. As for banishing the colonial legacy, Jammeh can effectively start by banishing the office of head of state, which is also a colonial legacy. One remembers rumours of a desire to be crowned king of Gambia which is still perhaps wriggling in the underbrush of his colonial mentality.

And there are other prominent colonial legacies he would have to kick out of Gambia if indeed he wanted to get rid of the colonial legacy. State House the building is a colonial legacy. So are the Gambian parliament, the judiciary, the civil service and the guns and cannon he depends upon. The various regional governors in The Gambia are inflated replicas of colonial district officers. Their responsibility and duty is not to the people they "rule" but to the ruler in Banjul, just as in the good old days of colonial rule. What Jammeh wants invariably trumps what the villagers of Fangfadi Kunda want from their governor. The office of Paramount Chief of the Gambia Jammeh created is a classical colonial legacy worthy of preservation at the Gambia National Archives. The present borders of The Gambia are a colonial legacy, too. As Jammeh very well knows, no country called Gambia existed in pre-colonial Africa. When Jammeh proudly inspects a Guard of Honour or majestically saunters down a red carpet, he is re-enacting a very prominent colonial ceremony – a tradition invented to "show the flag" of imperialism. And when Jammeh carries around the title "His Excellency", he is carrying the defining symbol of the colonial legacy – the name of colonial power. His Excellency was how colonial governors and other imperial officials were addressed. Colonialism brought the term to Africa. The extreme extent of Jammeh's colonial mentality is betrayed by the fact that not even "His Excellency" is considered powerful enough to reflect the his perceived power over the Gambian people. He insists on being addressed "The President of the Republic of The Gambia, His Excellency Sheikh Professor Alhaji Dr. Yahya AJJ Jammeh, Babili Mansa." Even Cecil Rhodes – that ultimate personification of colonial despotism – would balk at the idea of carrying such a hollow string of bogus colonial-style titles around his neck. Lord Lugard, prominent pioneer of the notorious colonial system of indirect rule, would grunt an emphatic "no" to these titles and perhaps abandon indirect rule rather than suffer the foolery of carrying such a long and embarrassing string of meaningless grandiose titles. In other words, the real colonial mentality of the colonial period is a drop in the ocean compared to Jammeh's colonial mentality.

The phrase “colonial mentality” is composed of two distinct phenomena. The term “colonial” is a temporal category, a period of time that existed in the past – the colonial period, let’s say from 1884 – 1960 when most of the African continent was under colonial rule. The term “mentality” is a state of mind, a way of thinking that informs the way human beings act as they go about their day-to-day business. “Colonial mentality” therefore refers to the way people thought and acted during the colonial period. In this formulation, the only sense in which ordinary Gambian citizens can express a colonial mentality is by acting like rightless subjects of an oppressive state, which is how their ancestors acted under colonial rule. The sting in “colonial mentality” belonged to the colonial state whose defining characteristics were political authoritarianism and economic exploitation. If any entity in today’s Gambia mirrors the authoritarian tendencies and characteristics of the colonial mentality, it is the Gambian state. And since the Gambian head of state equates himself with both the state and the nation, only he could express the colonial mentality in its damaging, authoritarian and exploitative sense. In effect, Jammeh’s authoritarian actions derive precisely from his colonial mentality. The true leader of a free, independent people cannot afford to disrespect or unjustly diminish the freedom and independence of his people.

It is not at all difficult to cite uncanny similarities between the way the colonial state acted and the way Jammeh acts. The colonial state was allergic to criticism by its subjects; Jammeh is allergic to criticism by Gambians and anyone else; he is more intolerant of dissent than the colonial state because the colonial state allowed African nationalists to criticize it in the course of demanding independence. The colonial state did not consult its subjects about its actions; Jammeh does not consult Gambians about his actions, the most recent being his unilateral attempt at making The Gambia an Islamic state with a mere rattling of his tongue at Brufut on 10 December 2015. He did not consult Gambians when he decided to pull the country out of the Commonwealth. The colonial state imposed itself upon Gambians and refused to budge until it was forced to do so by a combination of self-interested considerations and other factors external to itself. Jammeh imposed himself upon Gambians in 1994 and has declared that he will be in power “for a billion years” (his actual words), whether Gambians like it or not. Here again, he surpasses the colonial state in his personification of the colonial mentality. Over twenty years after he imposed himself upon Gambians with a great show of guns (much like the colonial state did “400 years” ago), Jammeh is still furiously fighting with his colonial mentality. He enjoys this fight with himself because it offers him the most accessible and least complicated justification for tightening the noose around the neck of Gambians.

(21 December 2015)

8

Yahya Jammeh and the colonial legacy

Once again, Gambia's self-proclaimed dictator Yahya Jammeh has been shown riding his favourite horse, with his favourite whip in hand, whacking angrily away at colonialism and claiming that colonialism did not bring anything to The Gambia. In a recent interview with *New African* magazine, Jammeh fumes that Britain did not build more than one school and one hospital in the country over a period of 400 years of colonial rule. It is a known fact that if you repeat a lie often enough, it becomes a truth in your own mind. I say this because contrary to Jammeh's frequent ranting about 400 years of colonialism, British colonial rule in The Gambia lasted a mere 76 years. While British and other Europeans had traded with Gambian merchants as early as the 1580s, The Gambia became a British crown colony only in 1889, and attained her independence in 1965 - exactly 76 years later. So his habitual reference to 400 years of colonial rule in The Gambia is a mere figment of Jammeh's imagination; an attempt, either deliberate or otherwise, to re-write history.

So it is absolutely not true that Gambia was colonized for 400 years as Mr. Jammeh would have us believe. Furthermore, anyone with the slightest sense of

history knows that colonialism was not in Africa to develop the continent but to serve the selfish interests of the colonizers. It was an inherently extractive and exploitative regime. So this is no news at all. Expecting development from colonialism is foolish and Mr. Jammeh would be better advised to stop beating a dead horse and blaming colonialism for the mess that he and other so-called leaders of post-colonial Africa have created and continue to create for their hostage peoples. Africans wanted independence; they got it. It is their responsibility to develop their countries and stop blaming the past.

But before we proceed, it might be well to remind Mr. Jammeh that he does owe a lot to colonialism. For one thing, if he must reject all things colonial, he must start by refusing to speak or write the English language. He must then repudiate the territorial boundaries of The Gambia and draw new ones since these boundaries are totally a colonial creation. Then he must abandon the institutions and structures that make up the state he rules over – the Cabinet, the Legislature, and the Judiciary – as all of these are products of the colonial regime. He must then do away with the flag and the coat of arms, both of which are typically colonial inventions. He must abstain from his beloved practice of inspecting the so-called guard of honour, a very colonial spectacle that he loves so much that his face literally glows with contentment as he stiffly marches and surveys the troops at the airport and elsewhere. Then he must proceed further to abandon State House, which is the former residence of the colonial governor, and disband the police, also inventions of colonial rule. And then he must demolish the Mile Two, Jeshwang, and Janjanbureh prisons because the prison as an institution remains one of the most obnoxious legacies of colonial rule. When next he talks about what colonialism has done or not done in Africa, he should not forget to thank them for what he calls his own five-star hotel – Mile Two Prisons. He must also thank them for bringing the uniformed army and the gun into Africa, the two pillars upon which his tyrannical regime squarely rests.

Perhaps, more important than all of the above is Jammeh's undying love affair with the biggest and worst legacies of colonialism – tyranny, oppression and financial exploitation. If we place his nonexistent 400 years of British colonial oppression on one scale and 20 years of Jammeh oppression on the other, Jammeh oppression will far outweigh colonial oppression by vast margins. More Gambians have been killed, tortured, jailed, fired without explanation, disgraced, disappeared and otherwise tormented in 20 years of Jammeh's rule than during 400 nonexistent years of colonial rule. And since colonial rule made no pretense at upholding human rights and the rule of law, Jammeh's total disregard for the rights and dignities of his own ostensibly decolonized and independent people is all the more shameful. Does Jammeh know that in post-1994 Gambia, some elders have demanded to know when all this independence would end?

If Jammeh prides himself in doing for Gambia what colonialism had failed to do, he must undertake to do the single most important thing colonialism failed to do: that is, politically empower the entirety of the Gambian population; eradicate mental poverty and political powerlessness by a rigorous regime of political education that will place power firmly in the hands of the people; cure the majority

of Gambians' erroneous perceptions of rulers as God-ordained; turn the Gambian people into one large sea of enlightened citizens who will vote for their leaders not based on tribal affinities or ignorant presuppositions, but on the grounds of informed choices and the potential for good, effective and ethical leadership; find words to replace Mansa Kunda because there is no such thing as Mansa Kunda in today's Gambia. Colonialism certainly was not interested in empowering the people or teaching them what they need to know in order to make informed choices. And since Jammeh pretends to be better than the colonial rulers, that is the first thing he should do. The infrastructural developments he likes to brag and pound his chest about are utterly insignificant compared to the people they are supposed to serve. If he truly cares for the Gambian people, he should build them instead, rather than waste millions of dollars building white elephant projects.

But, of course, bad leaders and tyrants prefer to build lifeless structures than to build living and intelligent beings. The lifeless roads and schools and other structures he likes to brag about will never question his authority or try to hold him accountable. But he perhaps knows that an intelligent and politically conscious population will not tolerate the kinds of utter nonsense he utters or the unethical activities he engages in. That is why he has banned newspapers and journalists have been killed, exiled or disappeared under his regime; and that is why Jammeh cannot tolerate the idea of anyone talking about human rights, the rule of law and democracy in The Gambia. And finally, Jammeh is a personification of the oppressive colonial rule. His regime is a form of internal colonialism that thrives on the oppression, tyranny and the exploitation of Gambia's resources – both human and material – for his own selfish gratification. So when he engages in whipping the dead horse of colonialism, he is actually engaged in earnest psychological self-flagellation.

(14 November 2013)

9

A case for universal despocide

If there was ever a classical example of bad leadership in Africa, it would be Yahya Jammeh's brutal neotraditional ruler ship. The litany of cases of unlawful and unnecessary arrests, tortures, detentions without trial, disappearances, and sackings without explanation, killings and foreign policy blunders that litter the landscape of recent Gambian history is enough to fill a large tome on the study of unethical, bungling and brutal ruler ship in Africa. Yet, the question that keeps coming up over and over again and that seems to have no obvious answer is why Gambians are putting up with Jammeh's unbridled tyranny and bullying. Some blame opposition cowardice in the face of the unchecked brutality inflicted upon their people and opposition passivity in the face of rampant human rights abuses committed by Yahya Jammeh. Others blame a world that calmly looks on as a mad despot kills and maims his own people without good reason. What are we to make of such obvious inaction in the face of a pathological display of raw power by an African despot over his own people? One cannot purport to know all the answers, or even the right answers to this question. However, we can start by looking at some factors that might help us understand just what is going on and why Jam-

meh's madness remains unchecked both by the opposition on the ground and the international community.

It is perhaps easy to explain the international community's inaction. Examples abound of the world looking on as despots, tyrants and mad men in power inflict horrible misery on their own people. The bottom line is that international politics is driven by self-interest. Powerful nations act against less powerful nations only to the extent that their perceived self-interests are at stake. Nietzsche's contention that there is no such thing as altruism might be challenged on several counts. However, there is no doubt that in the majority of cases, people do things because they anticipate some form of reward or avoidance of punishment as the outcome of their action. A person who helps a homeless person is motivated by kindness as well as a desire to satisfy a certain need in his heart, be it mere inner satisfaction or the anticipation of blessings or good karma. When France intervenes in northern Mali to stop the oppressive gang of mad fanatics masquerading as soldiers of God, we cannot exclude altruism from their list of motivations, but we may, if we look in the right places, also find that France gains something from her intervention. In short, powerful nations intervene in the internal affairs of less powerful nations only if there are tangible rewards to be reaped, or threats to be averted even if these rewards and threat-perceptions are less than the altruistic motivations that drive their actions.

The reasons behind international interventions in Africa were less complicated during the Cold War era, 1945 – 1989. During that period, the world was almost clearly divided into two opposing ideological camps – the capitalist West led by the United States and including Britain, France, West Germany and other Western European countries were pitted against the former Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, Vietnam, Cuba and other communist countries. Within this bi-polar configuration of the international political system, the entire world was an ideological battleground characterized by the politics of global ideological containment. What ideology spread where was perceived to be of paramount strategic interest to either bloc, and intervention was determined by the threat of ideological intrusion into opposing ideology spaces. At this time, the West intervened in countries like the Belgian Congo and helped remove leaders like Patrice Lumumba. In Ghana, the CIA was clearly implicated in the toppling of Kwame Nkrumah. Much later in Burkina Faso, Africa lost one of her best leaders when Western machinations caused the murder of Thomas Sankara. The Reagan administration initially gave blanket support to Samuel Doe because of Liberia's strategic importance to CIA surveillance in Africa. The communist bloc was equally guilty of subversion in Africa. A good case in point is the removal of Emperor Haile Selassie and Russia's subsequent propping up of Mengistu Haile Mariam, one of Africa's most brutal dictators. Once the Cold War was over however, African countries quickly became orphaned states. Both western and eastern strategic interests in Africa dramatically dwindled and countries became worthy of intervention only if they had resources like oil, gold or diamond from which powerful nations could benefit. In the years since 9/11, the presence of perceived terrorist threats in countries like Somalia and Mali has been enough to generate military intervention. In most of

the rest of the continent, people were left to their own devices and at the mercy of paranoid and brutal tyrants like Yahya Jammeh and Robert Mugabe.

In the case of present day Gambia, there seems to be no “good” reason why a powerful nation should send in troops to rid us of Jammeh’s tyranny. In spite of his loud protestations to the contrary, there is hardly any evidence that Gambia has vast oil and mineral resources in which other nations are sufficiently interested to want to get rid of him. The Gambia is also, at least as yet, not so much a haven of terrorist activity that countries like America would be interested in kicking Jammeh out. If a nation has no resources in which other countries are interested and if it poses no direct threat to the security of other nations, intervention, if it ever comes, would only come very late in the day when much destruction has been wrought on the lives and futures of entire populations. We may, however, notice a subtle difference between actual tangible self-interests and perceived self-interests. While actual interests are often quite visible to interested parties, they may in reality be merely perceived interests behind which lie profound interests that become evident only after the fact. Our position is that it is in every body’s interest to rid the world of political bullies who inflict untold suffering upon their own people just so they can cling on to power for as long as humanly possible. Despots and tyrants should be universal personae non grata for the mere fact that they violate the dignity of humanity and represent a festering wound on the face of civilized humanity. It would greatly help humanity if the world were to embark upon a campaign of what we might call despocide – the removal from power of despotic regimes everywhere, and especially in Africa. One feels that this is like wishing for the moon to come down; but well, no harm in wishing for our perceived interests, right? Unlike genocide, fratricide, matricide, and the other ‘cides’; despocide would be a good thing for humanity in general.

The issue gets trickier once we begin to wonder why organized political opposition on the ground in Banjul is not doing “much” to get rid of the Jammeh tyranny. Again, however we look at it, we cannot avoid the suggestion that self-interest is a key factor in the equation. Of course, especially in connection with the Gambian opposition parties, we need to keep in mind the subtle nuances between actual and perceived self-interest and the bigger question of what exactly constitutes self-interest. To reiterate our position, it is in everybody’s actual interest to get rid of all tyrants and political bullies including of course the bully of Kanilai. We believe that should the opposition organize a protest demonstration against Jammeh, it will attract more support from the public than it imagines, and it could lead to the collapse of the Jammeh despotism. Inevitably, there would be some casualties, and these might include at least some leaders of the opposition. As self-preservation is a natural tendency of human creatures, might the opposition’s inaction in the face of Jammeh’s brutality be explained as driven by the inherent need for self-preservation? And to what extent might this need for self-preservation be described as a form of cowardice and a lack of commitment to their rationale for existence – which is to free the Gambian people from the clutches of tyranny and to replace the current government with a better one headed by themselves? There are certainly no easy answers to these questions, and one would be hard pressed to

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pass judgment either way. Perhaps, we might conclude with some degree of accuracy that a people will rise and overthrow despotism when their suffering becomes physically unbearable. Perhaps - just perhaps - Gambians will soon reach a point when committing despocide against the Jammeh regime will become a matter of life and death, and hence of genuine interest to them. While not all dictatorships are weak in the knees, most dictatorships are actually elephants on mosquito legs, one small push and the entire structure crumbles in upon itself like a house of cards.

(29 November 2013)

10

Too late to make hay, Mr. Jammeh

On Wednesday, 2 October 2013 Gambian dictator Yahya Jammeh issued a statement declaring that the country had withdrawn from the Commonwealth with immediate effect. He described the Commonwealth as a “neocolonial institution” with which Gambia will have no further ties. The country became a member 48 years ago. After the military coup that brought Jammeh to power in July 1994, The Gambia was briefly suspended from the Commonwealth but readmitted shortly afterwards. The announcement perhaps shocked and surprised people unfamiliar with the strange antics of Mr. Jammeh. But those who know him well have grown immune to any surprises coming from the erratic dictator. Mr. Jammeh frequently makes outlandish and obscurantist claims on national radio and television. His frequent rants against the West are too well known for his withdrawal from the Commonwealth to raise any eyebrows among people well-informed of his antics.

Arguably, the Commonwealth has lost a lot of credibility in recent years. It is cash-strapped and serves more as a club of former British colonies than a useful platform for the resolution of serious issues affecting people in Commonwealth member countries. It largely turns a blind eye to human rights abuses by member countries. Once in a while, a despot grows so bad that his country is elbowed out,

as was the case with Mugabe. Currently, there is some strong international discontent over the holding of the next Commonwealth heads of government meeting in Sri Lanka, a country that ranks high on the list of human rights violators. That said, the suggestion that the Commonwealth is an extension of colonialism is at best childish, at worst plain stupid. It is not as if countries are forced to join the Commonwealth, or that they are obliged to be members against their will. The voluntary nature of Commonwealth membership therefore precludes any notion of colonialism, which was an enforced regime of foreign rule imposed on people without their consent. So if the Commonwealth is an extension of colonialism, it is so only in so far as it is coordinated by a former colonial power. Colonialism presupposes coercive control that is totally absent from Commonwealth membership. Mr. Jammeh should therefore give us a break on that score. Moreover, did he not realize what the Commonwealth was since 1994? Or did it just suddenly evolve into an evil neocolonial institution with which his pious government will have nothing to do? The devil is in the details Mr. Jammeh. Just look closer.

It is astounding to hear an African ruler (not leader) blaming neocolonialism over half a century after the attainment of “independence”. I say “independence” because in the majority of cases, the substance of African independence is at best of dubious quality and quantity. Independent African regimes have proven time and again that exploitation and oppression are not the exclusive preserve of foreign rulers; that indigenous rulers could be much more adept at exploiting their countries’ resources and inflicting unspeakable tyranny over their own people than foreign rulers. So “neocolonialism” in Africa today is perhaps more local than foreign.

There is indeed evidence to suggest that Britain in particular relinquished empire in order to keep it. But that concept and its attendant plan suffered a stillbirth because, among other things, the international order that emerged during the years of African “independence” in the late 1950s and 1960s saw the shifting of global hegemony away from the former colonial powers to the United States on one side and the former Soviet Union on the other. African countries as we know them today were born smack in the middle of an ideological warfare in which western Europe played at best a secondary role; at worst, she became more or less a handmaiden of the new global hegemon that was, at least in theory, opposed to traditional colonialism if only selectively. America continued to be invested in European imperialism to the extent that it served a useful purpose in the emergent politics of global ideological containment.

Ironically, the greatest threat to African freedom and development was neither neocolonialism nor communism or capitalism, the two antagonists in the new global warfare. It was rather, Africa’s new rulers. Having transitioned from nationalist agitators to heads of state, the continent’s new rulers gradually imposed a new form of internal colonialism on their own people. Opposition and dissenting opinion were brutally crushed in the name of obscure ideologies and an African exceptionalism that allowed them to dance to the tunes of their new ideological patrons, while tightening their grip on the futures of their own people. In the name of keeping communism or capitalism out of Africa, Africa’s new rulers promulgated

draconian pieces of legislation that allowed them to muzzle systemically all opposition, silence all dissent, impose one-party regimes, declare themselves presidents for life, promote blind loyalty on one hand and passive subject hood on the other, and strangle their countries' creative energies to an untimely death. With very few exceptions, Africa's new rulers imposed a particularly vicious form of neo-colonialism (new colonialism) on their own people. That trend continues to this day and is particularly acute in countries like The Gambia, Zimbabwe and Togo, among others where a coterie of clueless despots ride rough shod over the backs of their peoples while blaming neocolonialism, bashing the west and claiming they would never allow their countries to be re-colonized. Who wants to re-colonize Africa? Who wants to add Africa's mountains of extreme poverty to their own mountains of problems? Surely, those African rulers who shout "we will never be re-colonized" know that they are saying nonsense. They know that the very idea of re-colonization is as unlikely as the idea of turning back the hand of time. And if it comes to neocolonialism, well, they are the very personification of that hateful practice. They are Africa's new colonizers and the evidence is there for all to see except willfully blind despots and clueless psychopaths who seem to prosper to the extent that their peoples are depraved.

Withdrawing from the Commonwealth is unlikely to affect adversely the Gambian government to any serious degree. Perhaps the government can survive without the minimal technical assistance The Gambia receives from the Commonwealth. What with the Arab World Bank and generous friends like Taiwan pumping hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars into the only pockets that matter in The Gambia? What if Commonwealth scholarships for Gambian students are lost and jobs in the British military for Gambian citizens are lost? What if there are other negative effects on ordinary Gambian citizens? Well, that is the least of Mr. Jammeh's worries. He perhaps believes that by withdrawing from the Commonwealth, he is punching Britain on the nose. He obviously seems to conflate Britain with the Commonwealth. And so he perhaps thinks that withdrawing from the Commonwealth will frighten Britain away from criticizing his worsening human rights record. More plausibly, Jammeh knows that in the light of his terrible and increasingly depraved human rights record, he is on the way to expulsion or suspension from the Commonwealth. He perhaps got wind of plans to suspend or expel him from the Commonwealth at the upcoming summit in November. How best to avoid further international humiliation and save face than to brand the Commonwealth a neocolonial institution and quit while he still has a choice in the matter? Making hay while the sun shines, Mr. Jammeh? Not if there is no hay to speak of in the first place.

(7 October 2013)

11

Independence? What Independence?

One of the most annoying things about being an African is watching despotic governments like Yahya Jammeh's engage in bogus so-called independence celebrations. Millions of scarce dollars are spent in absolutely frivolous events to mark an independence that never was. So-called leaders like Yahya Jammeh should be ashamed of themselves because they are presiding over political regimes that are more incapable, more brutal and more repressive than the white colonial regimes ever were. That they should now purport to celebrate independence is not only an insult to the African intelligence, it is a mockery of natural justice and a crime against the innocent and suffering people of their countries.

Despots like Yahya Jammeh have no clue what independence means beyond its name. They are incapable of the kind of serious reflection, the kind of deep looking that reveals the profoundly serious connotations of the idea of independence. They see independence merely as the end of white colonialism, the opportunity for black despots to step right into the oppressive and exploitative shoes of the departing white rulers, to take over their guns and other instruments of oppression, and to inflict worse pain and suffering over their supposedly free peoples than the white man was ever capable of.

Half a century after the attainment of so-called independence, some of these despots like Gambia's Yahya Jammeh continue to fight for independence; they continue to assault and insult the white man and accuse him of spending centuries in Africa exploiting and oppressing us. These despots foolishly believe that Africans will buy their silly protestations of a second colonialism or pay heed to their empty ranting about a Godless West trying to exploit Africa. The reality is that despots like Jammeh are hostile to the West only because in their severely parochial and ignorant minds, it is the West that owns what Gambians are today fighting for – human rights, the rule of law, democracy, and respect for human dignity. Their despotic lack of human dignity does not let them swallow the reality that human dignity does not belong to any particular race; that human rights are God-given rights and not Western rights; that the law, and therefore the rule of law, does not belong to any particular race; that it is an integral aspect of the nation-state system, the very power that they so fanatically cling to. It is their fear of the popularization of these concepts and their hatred of hearing them uttered anywhere in the world that is driving despots like Yahya Jammeh into their incoherent and silly ranting and ramblings about non-existent threats of Western recolonization of Africa.

Despots like Yahya Jammeh are themselves the threats to African independence which, in its deepest sense, means African freedom: the freedom of the individual and the group to express themselves, to express their opinions, to join freely any political party of their choice, to hold their leaders to account, to criticize their government, to live as free and dignified human beings without fear of scurrilous informers, nefarious secret police and heartless death squads prowling the land, trigger-happy and thirsty for the blood of innocent victims that they would not hesitate to kill at a nod from bloodthirsty tyrants.

While Yahya Jammeh rants and raves against the West simply because he hates to hear about respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, he nevertheless glorifies himself as the head of the Western invented nation-state he lords it over; he rides expensive Hummers from the West; his bedroom is full of expensive western artefacts; he flies in Western aircraft; he salutes the flag, which is an invention of the West; he uses guns and tanks which were inventions of the West; he loves to engage in that most ridiculous of Western inventions – reviewing the troops and so-called and archaic guards of honour on arrival from visits abroad. If Yahya Jammeh hates the West so much and is such an African patriot, why does he not boycott everything Western and ride a donkey instead to work? If he refuses to ride on his expensive western Hummer and rides to work on the back of a donkey instead, then we will know that he is a real African patriot and will start taking his anti-Western rants seriously. But so long as he wallows in the lap of Western luxury and revels in the glamour of Western legitimacy including so-called independence celebrations and the use of the Western English language, he should give us a break about his meaningless ranting about the West being evil.

Independence from colonialism does not mean black despotism, Mr. Jammeh. It means true freedom of the people; it means liberty; it means economic prosperity; it means political empowerment of the people; it means the capacity of the

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people to overcome poverty and oppression. It means a kind of freedom and the enjoyment of individual and collective dignity that Gambians under your despotic rule are far from enjoying. So give us a break about your so-called extravagantly wasteful independence celebrations. Give us a break with your silly and childish rants against the West. Stop beating the dead horse of colonialism; stop fighting a non-existent enemy and admit that your regime is even worse than the colonial regime. Under you, Gambians are suffering a particularly vicious strain of internal colonialism that is worse than Western colonialism; and since you are incapable of reform, you must live with the reality that you have gone into history as one of Africa's most reactionary and backward despots. Every ignorant word you utter, every brutal action you take is being recorded by history and you will be the laughing stock and the object of the curses of future generations.

(12 February 2015)

12

Independence Revisited (1)

It is sometimes difficult to resist the temptation of entertaining a controversial question – was Africa ready for independence when it happened? Was the independence Africans envisaged and anticipated the independence they lived? The evidence is troubling. Most Africans have certainly not enjoyed the rights and freedoms in whose name their independence was sought. They have not enjoyed the economic promises either. In 2017, colonial culture continues to manifest itself in the parochial mentalities of some African leaders. Like the old white colonial officials, most African leaders are more preoccupied with their political survival than with the well-being of their people. Ultimately, we must also ask whether Africa was ready for the nation-state system into which it was inducted overnight.

Africans may rightfully answer yes to the second of the two questions we opened with. However, they would hesitate to answer no to the first question because like everyone else, we feel naturally worthy of freedom, especially freedom from oppression. This makes it hard for us to say we really don't think we were ready for independence when it happened. There is a hint of indignity in the admission that we may conveniently avoid and still remain in good company. Asking whether Africans were ready for independence is potential recipe for defensive indignation

and misinterpretation especially in scholarly circles where profound argumentation may be proffered in defence of controversial notions. In any case, since freedom is an inalienable right which may never be taken away, only circumscribed, we can safely conclude that colonialism never took away Africans' freedom to be Africans even though it wielded draconian power over those aspects of African life it could control.

By the end of the 1940s, no one needed much convincing of the need for decolonization, especially since Uncle Sam himself was so saying. Moreover, there emerged during and immediately after World War Two an array of newly minted international rights instruments from which African nationalists freely drew to justify independence. They cited the universal rights and freedoms provisions of the Atlantic Charter and reaffirmed their subscription to the egalitarian creeds of the Commonwealth, the United Nations, and all the "civilized" nations of the world (the uncivilized ones were not yet born). The Atlantic Charter's affirmation that all peoples have a right to self-determination was particularly potent in the hands of eager nationalists. They thrust it into the face of Winston Churchill, the eccentric British war-time prime minister, who resolutely insisted that the provision did not apply to Africa because Africa was considered part of the Empire at the time the Charter was issued in Newfoundland, August 1941. Both Africans and Uncle Sam politely and not so politely put it to Churchill that his interpretation could not be more selective. Churchill insisted that he did not become prime minister in order to preside over the dissolution of Her Majesty's empire. In addition to the Atlantic Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) was a favourite hobbyhorse for African nationalists and they rode it to good effect. But once independence ceremonies were over, people were forbidden to make reference to such weapons of neocolonial control as human rights, the rule of law and similar un-African things.

African independence ceremonies look curiously unreal. Most were little more than local stages for the performance and reaffirmation of imperial hegemony. They were glittering spectacles conjured, not so much to affirm African freedom, but to accord imperial majesty an opportunity to showcase its legendary glory. With eyes on the prize, the nationalists helped organize and foot the bill for the glittering spectacles, complete with dukes and duchesses, princesses and queens, lords and earls there on Her Majesty's behalf. The evidence suggests the British had a rich pool of dukes and duchesses who represented Her Imperial Majesty at African independence ceremonies. This perhaps gave these imperial dignitaries a sense of self-importance without diminishing the relative unimportance of African independence to Her Majesty's Government. In practical terms, Britain was really not losing an empire as much as she was shedding an increasingly heavy burden. African nationalists hardly considered it serious that the heavy burden of imperialism was headed straight for their own shoulders. Or perhaps in the dizzying frenzy of the moment, they simply did not think in terms of burdens. Independence suggested a certain lightness of being which was easy to take for granted if you were so inclined.

For example, during Gambia's independence ceremonies, the Queen dispatched

the Duke and Duchess of Kent as her official representatives, and both London and Bathurst actively encouraged the attendance of white dignitaries. Only after a long list of often expensive ceremonies in which the Duke dutifully re-enacted the entire spectacle of imperial power as he understood it was independence formally granted, through a royal charter signed by Her Majesty. The days leading up to 18 February 1965 were days of pomp and ceremony in Bathurst and its environs. Guards of Honour were held for the duke with the PM by his side. Expensive gala dinners were held at which the majority of the guests were colonial officials and other white people. The fact that more Europeans than Africans were invited to and attended these sumptuous dinners angered many African nationalists who loudly and publicly complained about the fact. Because it was African independence, they reasoned, Africans must enjoy more than other people at these dinners.

The speeches made by both colonial and local officials during African independence ceremonies were revealing. In *Enter Gambia*, his highly entertaining and profoundly edifying work on Gambia at independence, Berkeley Rice, who was present, reports that at a civic reception at Gambia High School, the Duke presented to Bathurst city officials “the Royal Charter by which Queen Elizabeth granted Bathurst ‘the status and dignity of a city’.” Until then, presumably, Bathurst was to Great Britain a mere colonial outpost, without status and without dignity. The two virtues – status and dignity – were owned and could only be conferred upon Bathurst by imperial authority. Rice reports how the duke claimed at the same event that “as I flew over your city an hour ago, I saw exciting possibilities for development” (Rice, 43). Needless to say, the duke saw no such possibilities from the air. The duke also presided over a Mansa Bengo (chiefs’ meeting) at Brikama at which a senior chief read an officially prepared statement of welcome and thanks from Bathurst to Her Majesty’s Government. The chief dutifully declared “it gives us confidence to know that as a Monarchy within the Commonwealth of Nations, we are members of that family of which Her Majesty is the Head” (Rice, 45). In response, the duke wrote another piece of invented history by proclaiming that “your proud record over the past years enables you to look forward to the future with every confidence” (Rice, 45). Obviously, whatever they had, Gambians could hardly boast of a proud record under colonial rule. The duke’s statement reveals the extent of imperial hypocrisy and the relative lack of importance attached to African independence. An English reporter covering the Mansa Bengo observed that the ceremony “looks like a bloody circus”.

It was not only chiefs and colonial officials who made strange statements during African independence ceremonies. Taking a cue from their party leadership, ruling party stalwarts and newspapers loudly exhorted their countrymen to put all their political differences aside and join the ruling party. The practice has not entirely disappeared from Africa even now. In Ghana, the *Accra Evening News* was particularly vocal in its uncompromising insistence that all Ghanaians must join the CPP (Convention People’s Party) or else. When Nkrumah proclaimed that “the CPP is Ghana and Ghana is the CPP”, party loyalists tried to make this a reality through every possible platform.

In Bathurst, *The New Gambia*, the mouthpiece of the PPP (People’s Progress-

sive Party), declared that “all politicians of all tendencies should rally round the Government of the masses, the PPP, so that the country’s concerted efforts will bear golden fruits. We must not allow factions to undermine the real issues of the day” (Rice, 331). The PPP was indeed the government of the masses; but more significantly, it was the government of the Gambian nation, which was larger than its supporters, defined here as the masses. In effect, the real issues of the day were parochialized and defined in absolute, narrow terms by the emergent African leadership and its supporters. Paradoxically, the emergent African nation was seen at once as a monolith, a single entity encompassing everyone, as well as a fractured entity composed of the government and its supporters on one hand, and everyone else on the other. In many African countries, the latter remain sadly marginalized in their national politics to this day, over half a century after independence.

After independence, African nationalists performed an ideological about-face that was astounding and profoundly damaging of the new nations’ political, and by extension socio-economic and cultural wellbeing. Having served their purpose of helping end colonial rule, the universal and inalienable rights and freedoms of expression and association deployed by the nationalists were now relegated to the outskirts of independence. This was perhaps because many African anti-colonial nationalists either did not understand or did not believe in all the hype they made about their people being equally deserving of independence – understood as freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law and other lofty humane ideals. As soon as independence was granted, it was sought to impose a uniformity of views and opinions on all matters political that reflected only the views and opinions of those in power. It was quickly forgotten that had the colonial state insisted upon and was able to enforce such uniformity of views and opinions, independence would not have come as easy as it did in some cases.

Nationalists understood that the colonial state collapsed precisely because it tolerated the colonized people’s rights and freedoms of expression, association and self-determination, all of which were promptly branded enemies of Africa after independence. Nationalists understood the power of a free mind expressed in political dissent and organization. They recognized the power of a free press and proceeded to systematically curb it for their own reasons. They saw what it did to the mighty colonial state; and being too concerned about “losing” power, they made sure that political dissent was either effectively discredited or weakened, as happened in Gambia under Jawara, or totally criminalized and abolished as happened in Ghana, Guinea and elsewhere in Africa. The idea of power belonging to the people was only useful as a rhetorical weapon against colonial rule. Like the international rights instruments the nationalist drew from in their UN, Commonwealth and other speeches against colonialism, the African people had also served their purpose and could conveniently be relegated to the dusty outskirts of independence and national politics.

While actively participating in the majestic ceremonies and openly basking in the pomp and glory of the imperial spectacle, Africa’s incoming government officials often made bold to reaffirm their unflinching loyalty to the imperial power and to declare their expectations of independence from both within and without

the former colony. Independence was often understood as empire weaning babies who were welcome to continue suckling at the imperial breast for the foreseeable future. In perhaps its most damaging misconception, independence was taken to mean the incoming government's right to assume a monopoly of all political truths, knowledge, decisions and policy directions and options for the new nation. Dissenting knowledge and opinion, however brilliant, was sacrificed on the altar of political expediency. Witness the sad fates of people like Diallo Telli in Guinea, J. B. Danquah in Ghana, and Sheikh Anta Diop in Senegal. Their ideas represented a rich fund of intellectual wealth that could have wonderfully energized their nations. Instead, they were hated and violently struck down for daring to express their legitimate political opinions. To this day ideas - the building blocks of human civilization - have not found their rightful place in Africa. Hence, Africa remains utterly "uncivilized" in its politics (see Gambia since 1994 for a contemporary example of "uncivilized" politics).

Independence was also understood to mean that the new African government was entitled to the material support of ostensibly private commercial entities existing within its territorial borders. In *Enter Gambia*, Berkeley Rice reports that three weeks before independence, the incoming PPP government called a special session of parliament to pass new immigration and naturalization laws and "to provide the administration and other Members of the House a public opportunity to voice their sentiments at this historic moment" (Rice, 29). The first speaker of the evening, a former Minister of Agriculture, "had a word of 'advice' for the commercial firms in Bathurst which, he assumed, were planning to make independence gifts to the government. From the United Africa Company, whose local British manager sat across the hall (the MP) hoped for at least 50,000 pounds in cash or kindness. Such a wealthy firm should set an example to others." To the five French trading firms operating in Gambia he said, "We do not want just a saucer with De Gaulle's photograph." For the Lebanese firm of S. Madi Ltd., owners of the Atlantic Hotel, Gambia Construction Company, the larger of the two peanut oil mills and many other local enterprises, (the MP) also had a word of advice: "I know the Lebanese - they are broad-minded people. Let their gift be one that will be remembered by generations of Gambians yet unborn" (Rice, 30). How unborn generations could remember what happened since they were not there is everybody's guess.

More interesting speeches followed: The Member from Lower Baddibu "lamented what he took to be the fact that 300 Englishmen had been invited to the Independence State Ball and only 35 Gambians." "It is Gambia's Independence!" yelled another MP who became a household name in Gambian politics. "Gambians should have priority. All these expatriates are invited to all these functions. This should not be. It is Gambians who should be at the center of things. We have been so long under colonialism that these things are now insults" (Rice, 31). An MP from Bakau tried to quote something Jesus said but forgot what it was; but his idea of independence were captured in a letter he had written to an American official who had visited Bathurst. The portion of the letter reproduced by Rice reads as follows, unedited: "As is known by the World news, our constitutional advance was successful by the attainment of Full internal self-government. Gambia was

backward but will be perhaps one of the most advance places in Africa for the good hope we have and determination of purpose. For its size and population many many thinks it is so forth. However, the inhabitants of the country are naturally unique by most human level. I do not bother into details but even the English whose rule the Gambia is perhaps do not fully well know this people. I can better conceive of something than what I should express in this letter” (Rice 31-32).

It needs to be said that Jawara’s utterances during Gambia’s independence ceremonies and on Independence Day itself suggest that he understood better than most the implications of what was happening. When the MPs above complained about white invitations, Jawara pointed out that in fact, all Gambians were (symbolically) present at the ball, even though 300,000 Gambians could not physically attend. “Remember,” he said, “we will be judged not by the measure of our jubilation, but by the energy we bring to solving the problems of independence” (Rice, 31). In his closing speech for the evening, Jawara also expressed his understanding that “independence brought with it new complex problems which henceforth we shall have to resolve on our own” and “in time, Gambia will prove that a small country can stand on its own feet, and play its own part in world affairs providing an example of stability and progress and good sense” (Rice, 34 – 35). On Independence Day, after receiving from the Duke the “Constitutional Instruments” formally granting Gambia independence, Jawara said among other things, that “we are very conscious that the task which lies before us is formidable and, this being so, we are the more determined to strive relentlessly to overcome the difficulties that make the task formidable” (Rice, 48).

Earlier at the special session of parliament, United Party leader P. S. Njie had welcomed independence but warned against “exchanging one set of masters for another” (Rice, 34). It appears that Pierre Njie’s warning proved prophetic. Jawara and his government were not outright dictators of the sort we had in Guinea or Mali, or in today’s Gambia; however, the master-servant relations between government and governed that characterized colonial Gambia characterized – if only in a benign form - the thirty years the PPP government was in power. Yes, Gambia “the improbable nation” became a nation under the PPP, and a respected one at that. Sadly, like many of his counterparts across the continent, Jawara assumed too much about the democratic nature of his *de facto* one party, and one-man rule, which eventually gave us a ruler who could pound his chest and proclaim to the world that he is a dictator. The good news is that if Gambians were not ready for the challenges of independence when it happened, they are now.

(1 December 2015)

13

Independence Revisited (2)

It was not only chiefs and colonial officials who made strange statements during African independence ceremonies. Taking a cue from their party leadership, ruling party stalwarts and newspapers loudly exhorted their countrymen to put all their political differences aside and join the ruling party. The practice has not entirely disappeared from Africa to this day. In Ghana, the *Accra Evening News* was particularly vocal in its uncompromising insistence that all Ghanaians join the CPP or else. When Nkrumah proclaimed that “the CPP is Ghana and Ghana is the CPP”, party loyalists tried to make this a reality through every possible platform.

In Bathurst, *The New Gambia*, mouthpiece of the PPP declared that “all politicians of all tendencies should rally round the Government of the masses, the PPP, so that the country’s concerted efforts will bear golden fruits. We must not allow factions to undermine the real issues of the day” (Rice, 331). The PPP was indeed the government of the masses; but more significantly, it was the government of the Gambian nation, which was larger than PPP supporters, defined here as the masses. In effect, the real issues of the day were parochialized and defined in absolute, narrow terms by the emergent African leadership and its supporters. Paradoxically, the emergent African nation was seen at once

as a monolith, a single entity encompassing everyone, as well as a fractured entity composed of the government and its supporters on one hand, and everyone else on the other. In many African countries, the latter remain sadly marginalized in their national politics to this day, over half a century after independence.

After independence, African nationalists performed an ideological about-face that was astounding and profoundly damaging of the new nations' political, and by extension socio-economic and cultural wellbeing. Having served their purpose of helping end colonial rule, the universal and inalienable rights and freedoms of expression and association deployed by the nationalists were now relegated to the outskirts of independence. This was perhaps because many African anti-colonial nationalists either did not understand or did not believe in all the hype they made about their people being equally deserving of independence – understood as freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law and other lofty humane ideals. As soon as independence was granted, it was sought to impose a uniformity of views and opinions on all matters political that reflected only the views and opinions of those in power. It was quickly forgotten that had the colonial state insisted upon and was able to enforce such uniformity of views and opinions, independence would not have come as easy as it did in some cases.

Nationalists understood that the colonial state collapsed precisely because it tolerated the colonized people's rights and freedoms of expression, association and self-determination, all of which were promptly branded enemies of Africa after independence. Nationalists understood the power of a free mind expressed in political dissent and organization. They recognized the power of a free press and proceeded to systematically curb it for their own reasons. They saw what it did to the mighty colonial state; and being too concerned about "losing" power, they made sure that political dissent was either effectively discredited or weakened, as happened in Gambia under Jawara, or totally criminalized and abolished as happened in Ghana, Guinea and elsewhere in Africa. The idea of power belonging to the people was only useful as a rhetorical weapon against colonial rule. Like the international rights instruments the nationalist drew from in their UN, Commonwealth and other speeches against colonialism, the African people had also served their purpose and could conveniently be relegated to the outskirts of independence and national politics.

While actively participating in the majestic ceremonies and openly basking in the pomp and glory of the imperial spectacle, Africa's incoming government officials often made bold to reaffirm their unflinching loyalty to the imperial power and to declare their expectations of independence from both within and without the former colony. Independence was often understood as empire weaning babies who were welcome to continue suckling at the imperial breast for the foreseeable future. In perhaps its most damaging misconception, independence was taken to mean the incoming government's right to assume a monopoly on all political truths, knowledge, decisions and policy directions and options for the new nation. Dissenting knowledge and opinion, however brilliant, was sacrificed on the altar of political expediency. Witness the sad fate of people like Diallo Telli in Guinea, J. B. Danquah in Ghana, and Sheikh Anta Diop in Senegal. Their ideas represented a rich fund of intellectual wealth that could have

wonderfully energized their nations. Instead, they were hated and violently struck down for daring to express their legitimate political opinions. To this day ideas - the building blocks of human civilization - have not found their rightful place in Africa. Hence, Africa remains utterly “uncivilized” in its politics (see Gambia since 1994 for a contemporary example of “uncivilized” politics).

Independence was also understood to mean that the new African government was entitled to the material support of ostensibly private commercial entities existing within its territorial borders. In *Enter Gambia*, Berkeley Rice reports that three weeks before independence, the incoming PPP government called a special session of parliament to pass new immigration and naturalization laws and “to provide the administration and other Members of the House a public opportunity to voice their sentiments at this historic moment” (Rice, 29). The first speaker of the evening, a former Minister of Agriculture, “had a word of ‘advice’ for the commercial firms in Bathurst which, he assumed, were planning to make independence gifts to the government. From the United Africa Company, whose local British manager sat across the hall (the MP) hoped for at least 50, 000 pounds in cash or kindness. Such a wealthy firm should set an example to others.” To the five French trading firms operating in Gambia he said, “We do not want just a saucer with De Gaulle’s photograph.” For the Lebanese firm of S. Madi Ltd., owners of the Atlantic Hotel, Gambia Construction Company, the larger of the two peanut oil mills and many other local enterprises, (the MP) also had a word of advice: “I know the Lebanese – they are broad-minded people. Let their gift be one that will be remembered by generations of Gambians yet unborn” (Rice, 30). How unborn generations could remember what happened since they were not there is everybody’s guess.

More interesting speeches followed: The Member from Lower Baddibu “lamented what he took to be the fact that 300 Englishmen had been invited to the Independence State Ball and only 35 Gambians.” “It is Gambia’s Independence!” yelled another MP who became a household name in Gambian politics. “Gambians should have priority. All these expatriates are invited to all these functions. This should not be. It is Gambians who should be at the center of things. We have been so long under colonialism that these things are now insults” (Rice, 31). An MP from Bakau tried to quote something Jesus said but forgot what it was; but his idea of independence was captured in a letter he had written to an American official who had visited Bathurst. The portion of the letter reproduced by Rice reads as follows, unedited: “As is known by the World news, our constitutional advance was successful by the attainment of Full internal self-government. Gambia was backward but will be perhaps one of the most advance places in Africa for the good hope we have and determination of purpose. For its size and population many many thinks it is so forth. However, the inhabitants of the country are naturally unique by most human level. I do not bother into details but even the English whose rule the Gambia is perhaps do not fully well know this people. I can better conceive of something than what I should express in this letter” (Rice 31-32).

It needs to be said that Jawara’s utterances during Gambia’s independence ceremonies and on Independence Day itself suggest that he understood better than most the implications of what was happening. When the MPs above complained

about white invitations, Jawara pointed out that in fact, all Gambians were (symbolically) present at the ball, even though 300, 000 Gambians could not physically attend. “Remember,” he said, “we will be judged not by the measure of our jubilation, but by the energy we bring to solving the problems of independence” (Rice, 31). In his closing speech for the evening, Jawara also expressed his understanding that “independence brought with it new complex problems which henceforth we shall have to resolve on our own” and “in time, Gambia will prove that a small country can stand on its own feet, and play its own part in world affairs providing an example of stability and progress and good sense” (Rice, 34 – 35). On Independence Day, after receiving from the Duke the “Constitutional Instruments” formally granting Gambia independence, Jawara said among other things, that “we are very conscious that the task which lies before us is formidable and, this being so, we are the more determined to strive relentlessly to overcome the difficulties that make the task formidable” (Rice, 48).

Earlier at the special session of parliament, United Party leader P. S. Njie had welcomed independence but warned against “exchanging one set of masters for another” (Rice, 34). It appears that Pierre Njie’s warning proved prophetic. Jawara and his government were not outright dictators of the sort we had in Guinea or Mali, or in today’s Gambia; however, the master-servant relations between government and governed that characterized colonial Gambia characterized – if only in a benign form - the thirty years the PPP government was in power. Yes, Gambia “the improbable nation” became a nation under the PPP, and a respected one at that. Sadly, like many of his counterparts across the continent, Jawara assumed too much about the democratic nature of his *de facto* one party, and one-man rule, which eventually gave us a ruler who could pound his chest and proclaim to the world that he is a dictator. The good news is that if Gambians were not ready for independence when it happened, they are now.

(3 December 2015)

14

Mandela's abiding legacy

On Thursday, 5 December 2013, the world received the news it has been dreading for the past several years: Nelson Mandela was dead, aged 95. Born on July 18, 1918, the former South African president spent 27 years of his life in prison before being released by F. W. de Klerk, the last president of Apartheid South Africa in 1990. In 1994, he became the first Black President of South Africa after that country's first multi-racial, democratic elections in over 300 years. After serving a single term of five years, Mandela stepped down from the presidency in 1999 and was succeeded to the post by Thabo Mbeki. After his retirement from politics, Mandela set up the Nelson Mandela Foundation in 1999 and dedicated much time and energy to the fight against HIV/AIDS, lack of adequate school buildings in South Africa, and other humanitarian causes. During his life time, Mandela won over 250 honours, including the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. He has gone down history as one of the greatest leaders the world has ever known and will ever know.

Mandela joined the African National Congress (ANC) in the early 1940s. In 1944, he and other young members of the ANC formed the ANC Youth League with a mission to further radicalize the organization. Founded by John Dube as the South African Native National Congress in 1912, the ANC got its current name in 1923. Dube was very much influenced by the ideas of Booker T. Washington, and because Washington was largely a pacifist who encouraged Black Americans to be content to just gain technical skills which would then make them acceptable to

White society, the early ANC was not as radical as Mandela, Luthuli, Sisulu and other young members wanted. That is why they formed the ANC Youth League to inject more energy into the organization.

Mandela and members of the ANC Youth League did not immediately turn to violence against the South African government. Even after Apartheid became official state policy with the coming into power of the Purified National Party in 1948, the ANC still used peaceful means to advocate for the rights of black and coloured people in South Africa. But Apartheid brooked no opposition, however peaceful. In 1956, Mandela, Luthuli and other 154 members of the ANC were arrested and tried on treason charges. The trial lasted until 1961 when all the defendants were acquitted and discharged. It was not until the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960 that the ANC leaders decided that the only effective way to deal with the Apartheid regime was through a violent revolution. Consequently, Mandela and his colleagues went underground and formed *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) or *Spear of the Nation* in 1961 to engage the Apartheid regime through guerrilla tactics. In 1962, Mandela was arrested again and sentenced to five years imprisonment. While he served his term, further charges of plotting to overthrow the government were brought against him. A new trial at Rivonia found him guilty and he was sentenced to life imprisonment in June 1964. First kept in Robben Island prison, Mandela was transferred to Pollsmoor Prison and eventually to Victor Vorster Prison from where he was released on February 11, 1990. Throughout the period of his incarceration, the MK conducted relentless bombing campaigns and other acts of guerrilla warfare against the Apartheid regime from bases in what were known as the Frontline States: Botswana, Mozambique, Angola, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi, bordering South Africa to the north.

By 1990, prominent members of the National Party Government in South Africa had realized that Apartheid was no longer a feasible government policy. The MK's bombing and guerrilla warfare was exacting a heavy toll on South Africa's internal security. Mass protests and demonstrations especially in the aftermath of the Soweto riots and massacre of June 1976, and the state-killing of Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko in 1977 were making it impossible for the South African government to maintain order. By the 1980s, the anti-Apartheid movement had become so persistent that Prime Minister P. W. Botha declared a state of emergency and launched what he called his Total Strategy because in his estimation, his government was under a Total Onslaught by anti-Apartheid groups in the country. At the same time, international pressure against the Apartheid regime had steadily picked up steam in the 1970s and gained momentum in the 1980s. Anti-Apartheid UN Resolutions and protest marches had become a common feature of international politics by 1985. When the U.S. Senate overrode a veto by President Reagan and passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act in 1986, the Pretoria regime began to crumble in upon itself. Washington was one of the strongest supporters of the Apartheid regime since its inception in 1948, which coincided with the heating up of the Cold War. Taking advantage of the anti-communist paranoia in Washington and other Western capitals, the Apartheid regime branded the ANC, the Pan-Africanist Congress, the Black Consciousness Movement and all other

anti-Apartheid groups communist and thereby won the unconditional support of successive U.S. governments. This all changed in 1986 when the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act imposed trade and travel sanctions against South Africa, demanded an end to Apartheid, called for the release of Nelson Mandela and asked for a time-table for the conduct of democratic elections in that country. When F. W. de Klerk took over after P. W. Botha's resignation in 1989, he knew he had to end Apartheid or risk letting South Africa slide into a full-blown civil war and economic ruin.

Mandela and the ANC were swept to power in the first democratic elections in South Africa in 342 years. Since Jan van Riebeck, an agent of the Dutch East India Company, landed at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, the majority of South Africans had suffered racial discrimination and oppression by a small group of white rulers and their enablers, including black South Africans. For the first time in 1994, the disenfranchised people of South Africa enjoyed universal adult suffrage and voted overwhelmingly for Mandela and the ANC.

Shortly after coming into power, Mandela and the ANC government passed the Promotion of National Unity Act which set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Under the Chairmanship of Bishop Desmond Tutu, the TRC was mandated to help South Africans deal with their violent past. Perpetrators of Apartheid era atrocities were encouraged to come forward and confess to their crimes. Where their crimes were not too extreme, these people were granted amnesty by the TRC and their victims and their families granted some compensation. Where their atrocities were too much to forgive, or where they denied committing crimes in the face of evidence, their cases were passed on to the judicial system and they were tried and if found guilty, convicted. Through the TRC process, Mandela was able to help South Africa come to terms with its violent past and learn to live together as a rainbow nation. While the TRC has been criticized on many fronts, it was a lesser of two evils: the greater evil being allowing a regime of retributions and vendettas to grip South Africa and lead to untold consequences for the newly freed nation.

But while the TRC was certainly one of Mandela's greatest achievements, his abiding legacy for most Africans is the fact that he stepped down from power after serving only one five-year term as president of South Africa. In a continent with a long and ugly tradition of sit-tight dictators who cling on to power for as long as they are alive, Mandela's act represented an example that will yet be South Africa's ultimate saving grace. Once he set that precedent, no South African president will ever be able to cling on to power beyond their mandated terms. Having given all his adult life to the struggle for justice in South Africa, Mandela could have continued winning elections for as long as he wanted; but he was an honourable giant who would not stoop that low and who had the honour, the integrity and the foresight to know that stepping down after only one term was perhaps the best service he could render to his people. And they are no doubt grateful for that honourable gesture. And so are all of us who hanker after leaders of Mandela's stature in sub-Saharan Africa.

(6 December 2013)

15

Open letter to President Jammeh: On living by Mandela's legacy

Dear Mr. Jammeh,

One cannot help but agree with you that following Mandela's passing "all that we need to do is to live by his legacy and live by the ideals and virtues that he stood for." These, according to the Daily Observer griot, are your very words uttered in Paris as part of a tribute to Mandela. Inspired by those words of yours, some of the questions we wish to reflect upon in this open letter are these: What is Mandela's legacy? What are the ideals and virtues he stood for? And to what extent might we reasonably expect you, as president of our country, to live by this legacy and these ideals and virtues? First of all, we must admit that it is very difficult to mention all of Mandela's legacies and the virtues and ideals he stood for. We will therefore be content to mention only a few of the key legacies and highlight some of the virtues and ideals that he stood for.

As far as we are concerned, the legacy most pertinent to our current Gambian and African situation is the fact that Mandela spent his entire life fighting for the freedom of his people, black, white and coloured. He spent 27 of the best years of

his life in prison. He came out of prison and was elected president of South Africa with a constitutional mandate to serve two terms. He served only one term and stepped down from power, allowing South Africa to move on without him at the helm. He was neither coerced nor compelled to step down. At the very least, he could have served a second term; at most, he could have stayed on in power after serving a second term. And while this might have raised many eyebrows in South Africa and beyond, he could have continued winning elections for as long as he wanted. However, he knew that was the wrong and unethical thing to do. And so he did the right thing. He knew very well the corrupting influence of power. As he said in a 1996 impromptu statement at his official residence in Pretoria: "The history of liberation heroes shows that when they come to office . . . they often lose their common touch, and turn against their own people." Of course, these liberation heroes would never accept the fact that they have lost their common touch, or turned against their own people. They are always able to justify their positions, to insist that everything they do is for the good of their own people, to pretend that they are the only ones capable of leading their people, that without them, their countries are doomed. They fall into a chronic state of denial, much like Pharaoh, Hitler, Mussolini, and Mugabe, and sorry to say, your very good self, Mr. Jammeh. It takes real courage to acknowledge our errors when it is much easier to insist on our correctness. It also takes honour, integrity and wisdom which many profess but few possess.

Anyway, back to Mandela's legacy of stepping down after only one term of five years. How does this particular legacy compare with yours, Mr. Jammeh? You seized power from a regime that was nowhere close to the vicious Apartheid regime Mandela dislodged. After your unconstitutional seizure of power, you claimed that you "are not here to stay" and that your intention was merely to rectify the wrongs of the Jawara regime and step down. You also declared that "ten years is too long" for anyone to stay in power; and you promised to make sure that no president would ever again spend more than two-terms of five years in power. Twenty years later, you are still in power, and determined more than ever before to stay in power for as long as you possibly can. Are you therefore morally suited to talk about living by Mandela's legacy? Do you think that merely saying that we should live by Mandela's legacy makes it so that we are living by his legacy? If you wish to live by Mandela's legacy, a good starting point is to consider stepping down from power and handing over the leadership of our country to another person. If you are not willing to do this, you have no moral right to mention anything about living by Mandela's legacy and you are in the process of destroying our country, whether you choose to believe this or not. Have you ever heard what Mandela said about freedom? He said: "The purpose of freedom is to create it for others." You don't fight for freedom only to deny it to others. Indeed, Gambians enjoyed more freedom under Jawara than they do under you. You can deny this all you want; but that doesn't change the reality that the Jawara regime was never half as oppressive as yours.

A second major legacy of Nelson Mandela is the fact that within the short span of five years in power, he was able to unify a nation that for over 340 years had

been characterized by racial oppression and animosities. Through the Truth and Reconciliation process, through his words, and through a series of personal actions, he literally embraced his former tormentors not out of meekness or fear, but out of a deep-seated conviction that South Africans were one nation and that they either had to swim together or sink together. In the end, he taught South Africans to live together as one united family, in spite of their differences – racial, political, material, or otherwise. Mandela visited the widows of the people who unjustly threw him in jail and relentlessly spoke about the need to place South Africa over and above personal whims, caprices and grievances. He loved the prison warders at Robben Island and other places where he was incarcerated, even though they were the instruments of the unjust system of Apartheid used to oppress him and his people. He never threatened his critics with death and damnation or called his opponents animal names. How many times have you called members of the Gambian media and the opposition donkeys and illegitimate sons of Africa, even though you know that the Almighty Allah frowns upon such a practice?

Clearly, The Gambia had no history of the kind of oppression and racial or political divide that characterized South Africa when Mandela took over in 1994, the very year that you seized power. Gambians had legitimate political differences and quarreled, even fought about them. But by and large these political differences were endured if not actually tolerated. And while South Africans have learnt to work together across political and racial divides, Gambian society under your watch has become more polarized and divided than was ever imaginable back in 1994. You have therefore failed a second test of following or emulating Mandela's virtues, his ideals and his legacy. If you are truly sincere in your belief in the truth-loving Almighty Allah you like so much to sing about, then you must be brave enough to recognize how far you have caused divisions among the Gambian people and make amends. One way of stopping the damage you have done and are doing to our social cohesion is by stepping down, for you have no moral right in the face of the solemn oaths you swore and the solemn promises you made back in 1994 to the effect that you were not here to stay and that ten years was too long for any single person to stay in power. You have stayed in power for twenty years. Do the morally right thing by fulfilling the promises you made to the Gambian people, the promises you swore by the Almighty Allah that you would fulfil. If you are unwilling to do this, you have no moral right to talk to anyone about following the legacy of Nelson Mandela or living by his ideals and virtues. And you know deep down in your heart that the Almighty Allah frowns upon those who break their promises and cause disorder in the earth. You must have come across the Quranic injunction: "Do not cause disorder in the earth." Have you ever reflected upon the deeper meanings of this injunction Mr. Jammeh? Unless all your endless Almighty Allah protestations are mere sound and fury, signifying nothing, you ought to live by the ideals and lessons that the Almighty Allah ordains in the Holy Quran.

Now Mr. Jammeh, how do you think Mandela would respond if he were ever asked whether it is okay to call you "The Gambian Leader His Excellency Sheikh Professor Alhaji Dr Yahya Jammeh, Naseeru Deen and Babili Mansa?" Judging from what we know about him, Mandela would have said it is not proper for any

human being, however great, to carry such a lengthy and superfluous title upon his shoulders. Mandela won over 250 honours during his lifetime, including an endless string of honorary doctorates from the world's most prestigious universities. Yet, he insisted on being simply called Mandela or Madiba; not even Dr Mandela. Suffice it to say that you cannot even begin pretending to live by Mandela's legacy, his ideals and his virtues as long as you carry that heavy burden of superfluous and meaningless titles on your shoulders. One can safely conclude that the Almighty Allah for whom you profess so much love and respect does not approve of your long string of titles because they smack of arrogance and the days of darkness. Allah loves humility and your superfluous titles make you out as anything but humble. Mandela was a paragon of humility and you cannot even begin to approach thinking about his legacy without making that virtue a reality in your life. So until you start being the humble Muslim and believer in the Almighty Allah you so like to sing about, please spare us the sermons on living by Mandela's legacy, his ideals and virtues.

And one final observation Mr. Jammeh: Upon arrival in Banjul from Paris and still paying tribute to Mandela, you said that "the struggle has now started for the total liberation of Africa because the conditions that exist [today] were the same conditions that existed before the white man came to Africa." Now this statement really made us scratch our heads and loudly groan. What exactly do you mean, Mr. Jammeh? Was this another unfortunate slip of the slippery tongue? How could the conditions that exist today possibly be "the same conditions that existed before the white man came to Africa"? Are you suggesting that we have gone back in time to pre-colonial Africa? How then do we explain the fact that we all exist in 2013 and not 1320? Or are you suggesting that it is okay for African rulers like Yahya Jammeh to behave in 2013 like Sumanguru Kanteh behaved in 1230, long before the white man came to Africa? You have made many confused statements in the past that are all part of your legacy, Mr. Jammeh. Maybe we should just add this one to that long list of confused legacies because we simply cannot wrap our noses around it. We won't even try, Mr. Jammeh, for 1230 and 2013 are centuries apart and we are not going back even if we wanted to. We do not live in a kingdom under an unaccountable king. We live in a constitutional republic of laws overseen by a constitutional head of state that we will hold accountable. We insist on living by the example, the legacy, the ideals and the virtues of Nelson Mandela: fair play, freedom, honour, justice, human rights, the rule of law, and humility among others which are totally beyond the reach of arrogant and power-hungry persons who pretend to be pious.

(9 December 2013)

16

Why Deyda's killers are still at large

On Thursday, 16 December 2004, unidentified gunmen drove an unmarked car alongside journalist Deyda Hydara's car and shot him dead. Ever since, there have been persistent calls for the Gambian authorities to investigate the murder and bring the perpetrators to book. Unfortunately, this is unlikely to happen. The reason is simple: Deyda Hydara was killed by Yahya Jammeh himself, on the orders of Yahya Jammeh, or on behalf of Yahya Jammeh. Either he himself pulled the trigger, had someone pull the trigger, or knew exactly who pulled the trigger.

The Jammeh dictatorship, like all other dictatorships, see the exercise of political power as waging a war against their own people – at least those segments of the population who dare to question their words and actions. It is a sad reality of international politics that the notion of war is largely confined to military encounters between two or more armed entities, whether these are international or intra-national. The concept that governments wage war against their own populations is yet to be sufficiently lodged in the human consciousness. Yet, this is exactly what has been happening and continues to happen in every country ruled by a dictator.

Having the guns of the security and armed forces at his beck and call, Yahya

Jammeh has never hesitated to have anyone he considers a potential threat to his grip on power shot dead. Whether the shots are heard as in the case of the dozen or so student demonstrators on April 10-11, 2000, or in the case of the November 11, 1994 incident, or the case of Deyda Hydara on December 16, 2004; – or whether dead bodies just turn up as in the case of Ousman Koro Ceesay and the 44 Ghanaians; or whether they simply disappear from the face of the earth as in the case of Daba Marenah and his companions; or in the case of journalist Chief Ebrima Manneh – the fact remains that Yahya Jammeh sees politics as war in which all opponents deserve to die.

Yahya Jammeh feels that politics is merely an extension of the actual battlefield. Of course, having long decided that he knows everything there is to know about life, death, and everything else, Yahya Jammeh has failed to learn anything politically “useful” to him since 1994. His blinding hubris makes sure that he feels supremely confident that he knows all there is to know and does not need to be told what to do or not to do. If he decides that politics – and perhaps life in general – is a war, then it must be a war and he reserves the right to kill in self-defence and self-preservation, just like in the actual military battlefield.

His appeal to the right to self-defence is further legitimated by his determination to hold the Gambian people hostage for as long as he is alive. Of course, Yahya Jammeh does not believe that he is holding anyone hostage. He does not believe that he is doing anything wrong by staying on in power to the exclusion of everyone else. If Jawara stayed in power for 30 years, why not Yahya Jammeh? He has said these very words over and over again, in spite of his well-documented promise in the aftermath of the July 1994 coup to make sure that no president stays in power beyond ten years. But what are promises in war in which dangerous enemies lurk in every corner trying to bring him down? And who can do anything about it anyway if he decides to stay in power for as long as he wants? Because politics is war, he will keep his guns ready to kill anyone who tries to deny him his right to power. If anyone wants to be president, they will have to fight and physically subdue him. Short of that, he is going to stay in power. To hell with everything else.

Bereft of the intellectual and moral resources he needed to counter Deyda’s cohesive and persistent arguments on the need for the observance of justice, human rights, the rule of law, and commonsense in his government, Yahya Jammeh simply had him killed, just like he had Koro Ceesay, the students, Daba Marenah and others killed. In Yahya Jammeh’s conception of Gambian politics as war, Deyda Hydara represented just another enemy soldier who, though armed only with a pen, was out to cause his defeat and downfall. And so he easily justified Deyda’s murder as an act of self-defence.

The bad news for Yahya Jammeh is that he is not going to get away with it as he thinks he will. No one gets away with murder – not forever. No one, especially one under the glaring lights of international scrutiny like the president of a country, can kill his citizens with impunity and expect to live happily ever after. The Jammeh regime cannot investigate and catch Deyda’s killer because they are Deyda’s killer. This was the scenario in the student massacres of April 2000. Having ordered

that the students be shot dead, Yahya Jammeh could not then turn around and have those who merely followed his orders punished. After all, this is war. Eventually though, Yahya Jammeh will have to pay for his crimes against humanity. His government will not investigate the killing of Deyda Hydara. But neither will he escape the very long arm of justice forever. It is either human justice or divine justice, but justice nevertheless. There is no escaping that punishment.

Furthermore, there is no way that Yahya Jammeh can erase the memory of Deyda Hydara. The international community and the Gambian people – those who love truth and justice – will continue to wave Deyda Hydara's name, image and spirit in Jammeh's face, and will continue demanding that his killers be brought to justice. In spite of his murder, Deyda Hydara lives on and continues to inspire in us the love of truth and justice, and to continue the fight against the impunity, injustice and tyranny that so brutally and callously snatched him from his loved ones.

(12 December 2012)

17

Gambia: Why Sharia is not an option

Around the middle of January, 2013, Gambia's dictator Yahya Jammeh – who insists on being called His Excellency the President Sheikh Professor Alhaji Doctor Yahya AJJJ Jammeh – dropped yet another of his increasingly eccentric bombshells: he decreed – without any known consultation with the cabinet or legislature – that effective February 1, the country's work week would be reduced from five to four working days. Instead of working Monday to Friday 8:00 – 4:00 pm, Gambians were now ordered to work Monday to Thursday, 8:00am – 6:00pm. Henceforth, Friday was to be reserved for prayer and agricultural work on the farms. A couple of weeks later, Jammeh argued publicly that if Christians had Sunday off for prayer, why shouldn't Muslims have Friday off for prayer? In his usual unthinking totalitarianism, Jammeh did not expect anyone to question the wisdom of his latest imposition on the Gambian people.

Jammeh's latest act of mindless eccentricity created a loud buzz within the international community. While only sighs of resignation and despair were perhaps mouthed inside the country for fear of arrest, torture or disappearance orchestrated by the ostensibly all-seeing police state, the protests of the Gambian Diaspora community hit listservs and online media with characteristic vehemence. The

usual questions were raised about Jammeh's sanity and just what useful purpose this reduction of the work week served. What were its potential consequences for the Gambian economy? Why does Jammeh turn the country and its people into mere toys to play with according to his fancy? Interestingly, hardly any member of the Gambian Diaspora expressed concern that the erratic dictator was about to turn the country into an Islamic state under sharia law. They knew their man better than that.

The international community, however, was visibly shaken. Many thought that Jammeh, who makes no secret of his hatred of the West and supposedly western concepts such as human rights, the rule of law and democracy, was about to turn the tiny secular country into a theocracy which will then serve as a haven for the dreaded Islamic fundamentalists now prowling the wastelands of Africa and wreaking havoc on already suffering nations and peoples. If Jammeh could claim to have found a cure for HIV/AIDS, if he could claim to have been born three months after independence because he did not want to be born under colonial rule, if he could repeatedly tell the west to go to hell, what would prevent him from doing or saying whatever caught his fancy, like imposing sharia law on the country?

It was with an effort to find out if Jammeh indeed wanted to turn The Gambia into an Islamic theocracy that the BBC called me for an interview on the four-day week. When the news anchor asked what I thought might be the reason for Jammeh's imposition of the four-day work week, she perhaps expected me to confirm what she and many others in the international community suspected: that he was edging towards imposing sharia law on the country. When I gave her my take on the issue – which I share below – her response was whether I did not think that was rather outlandish? Was it not perhaps because Jammeh was thinking of turning The Gambia into an Islamic state? Yes, it was outlandish; but outlandish is precisely one accurate way of describing Yahya Jammeh. And no, I did not think that Jammeh was about to turn The Gambia into an Islamic state. Here's why.

While about 90 per cent of Gambians are Muslims, they are not the type of Muslims that would tolerate being forced to wear the veil, grow a beard, or stop wearing shorts and other clothes of their choice. Jammeh knows that while some Gambian Muslims would perhaps out of fear comply with such an order, the majority would hate the idea of being forced to do so. Trying to impose the veil on Gambian women or banning the wearing of shorts or western clothing in The Gambia could ignite the tinder box that would eventually blow him and his power to pieces. Jammeh knows that only too well.

Moreover, about nine to ten per cent of Gambians are either Christians or adherents of traditional religions. There is no way that these Gambians can be made to abide by Islamic sharia law and it would be an unbearable burden on state resources to determine who was Muslim or not Muslim on a daily basis in an attempt to enforce sharia law. If Jammeh attempts to impose sharia law in The Gambia, he would have to deal not only with large numbers of Muslims refusing to abide by the law, but will also have to contend with the sizeable number of Christians and traditional religionists – including many in the security forces – who will never accept sharia law.

I also told the BBC that Jammeh was not about to impose Sharia law in The Gambia because that would prevent him from enjoying some of his favourite pastimes. At his home village of Kanilai, Jammeh maintains an expensive palace where he enjoys watching half-naked female wrestlers juke it out to the accompaniment of much drumming, dancing and clapping that are evidently unIslamic. Another of his favourite pastimes is hosting performances by traditional dance troops, magicians and sorcerers who demonstrate their knowledge of the occult to his ultimate delight. Recently, one magician from Mali claimed to have transformed a young man in the audience into a likeness of the president. In the video footage of the event, Jammeh could be seen raising his hands and bragging “I am Yahya Jammeh!” amidst much clapping, shouting and drumming. If Jammeh imposes sharia law in The Gambia, he could not possibly continue enjoying these totally unIslamic hobbies.

My “outlandish” explanation for Jammeh’s reduction of the work week was that while it was totally impossible to prove the thesis, it was most likely that Jammeh had been warned by one of his sorcerers to avoid going to work on Fridays. It is common knowledge among Gambians that in spite of his pretence to Islamic piety by dressing like an Arab sultan and perpetually clutching a prayer bead and what looks like a copy of the Koran (people speculate that it is not in fact a Koran, but a box of fetishes), he is an ardent believer in the occult. He himself has boasted many a time that he possesses knowledge of the occult. So it is very plausible that having been warned by a sorcerer to avoid going to work on Fridays for fear of being ambushed and overthrown, and because he could not possibly stay home every Friday and expect everyone else to go to work as this might raise some unwanted questions, Jammeh decided to make everyone stay at home on Friday. He found a plausible excuse by claiming that Muslims needed a full day of their own for prayer and work on the farms. What discredits this notion is that Fridays were half days anyway in The Gambia. People got off from work at 12:30pm and went home in good time for the Friday prayers at 2:00pm or 3:00pm in some cases. Also, most of those who work on the farms are not salaried workers anyway and reside in the rural areas of the country. Neither office nor farm work has ever prevented those who want to attend the Friday prayers from doing so.

While Yahya Jammeh habitually wears Muslim clothes and holds Muslim paraphernalia in his hands, many Gambians know that he is far from being a good Muslim or one seriously concerned about the teachings of Islam. His hobbies – outlined above – are patently unIslamic. And while he likes to invoke Allah’s name and swear by the Koran, his use of the religion is at best Machiavellian, at worst, outright hypocritical. His frequent verbal assaults on innocent people, the foul language he habitually uses, his frequent threats to murder his critics, his unceasing boasting and chest-pounding, and his well-known and frequent unjust punishment of innocent people – the arbitrary arrests, detentions, tortures, disappearances and killings of his critics and perceived enemies, including most recently the disappearance of the well-respected Imam Baba Leigh for calling his execution of nine persons by firing squad unIslamic – these are not the marks of a true Muslim. A true Muslim cannot tell a lie as big as that he chose to be born after independ-

ence because he did not want to be born under colonial rule or that he had found a herbal cure for HIV/AIDS that was revealed to him by his ancestors. A good Muslim cannot be consumed by the kind of hubris that consumes Yahya Jammeh.

Indeed, nothing in his demeanour suggests that Yahya Jammeh is a true Muslim. Rather, he is a fervent animist who, in pure Machiavellian fashion, has found in Islam a tool for the control, manipulation and subjugation of a largely unsophisticated and increasingly apathetic population.

There might, however, be one other plausible explanation for Jammeh's decision to cut the work week that again, has nothing to do with Islam: he might be trying to please his patrons in the Arab world. Perhaps by declaring Friday a day of prayer, he hoped to elicit approving nods from some oil rich sultan who would be happy to give him the money he persistently begs for. Since he is getting increasingly isolated by Western donor nations and institutions, sucking up to the Arabs might be a form of guarantee against total bankruptcy for his government. Indeed, barely a week after the beginning of the four-day work week, he made a working visit to the Middle East. But as far as imposing sharia law in The Gambia is concerned, that is just not a feasible option for Mr. Jammeh.

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Africa's hidden wars

The era of mass anti-colonial nationalism in Africa saw the advent of war against foreign domination in Africa. Mass nationalism took either a peaceful form, with the key strategies being protest and petition, or it took a violent form with African groups taking up arms against the colonizing power. Examples of peaceful nationalism took place in Gambia, Ghana, Guinea and the Ivory Coast among many others. Examples of violent nationalism were conducted by the Mau Mau in Kenya, the PAIGCC in Guinea Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands [African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde], and ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe. The struggle for African independence in most of its manifestations picked up after the Second World War and continued in some countries until the 1980s and 1990s. Colonialism was generally perceived as a system that exploited Africa's resources – both human and material – and that inflicted an unbearable level of oppression on the African people. Forced labour and harsh taxation regimes combined with reluctance to Africanize the colonial civil service were sources of much discontent among African nationalists. African participation in the Second World War mostly on the side of the Allied powers – including France and Britain – the passage of the Atlantic Charter in 1941, the formation of the United Nations in

1945 and the promulgation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 all fed into the growing stream of anti-colonial discontent and emboldened the movement for self-determination in Africa. The Atlantic Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights emphasized people's rights to self-determination and so provided ammunition for both the physical and metaphorical guns of anti-colonial nationalists. African nationalists cited the provisions of these documents and called for an immediate end to foreign domination. Excuses offered by colonizing powers such as that they did not have their African colonies in mind when they promulgated the Atlantic Charter did not fly with either African nationalists or other international parties advocating an end to colonial rule. So beginning in 1957 with Ghana and through the early sixties, the majority of African countries gained independence. They now had their own African-led governments modelled on the western nation-state system.

Almost immediately after independence, African governments started transforming the skeletal security forces left behind by the colonial authorities into fully fledged national armies. In the case of The Gambia, President [Dawda] Jawara decided to establish the national army largely because he wanted to meet the requirements of the Senegambia Confederation and after he narrowly escaped being overthrown by Kukoi's Supreme Council of the Revolution in 1981. Research shows that between 1958 and 2001, there were a total of 89 successful coups, over 100 failed coup attempts, and over 130 alleged coup plots in Africa. These figures have no doubt jumped up in the dozen years since 2001. Having seized power in the name of liberating their citizens from corrupt and/or repressive civilian regimes, these armies almost without exception immediately turned upon the very people they claimed to be protecting. Classic examples of these saviour-turned-tormentor regimes include Jammeh's Gambia, Doe's Liberia, Eyadema's Togo, Amin's Uganda, Abacha's Nigeria, and Acheampong's and Rawlings' Ghana.

While in some cases like Senegal, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Nigeria – among others – the military has contributed significantly to the preservation of national sovereignties against armed internal or external threats, the great majority of African armies have generally trained their weapons not against internal secessionists, external aggressors, or rival states, but against their own unarmed and law-abiding civilian populations. The army's role as the repressive arm of dictatorial governments on the continent is complemented by a gamut of police and civilian security agencies, presidential militias and death squads often beholden to none but the head of state. They have come to constitute key pillars of the shadow states that have been created by African dictators as a way of circumventing regular government institutions and flouting judicial processes and the rule of law. They are interested in protecting not the security of the nation-state, but the security of the head of state as an individual who holds the nation ransom and considers himself above the constitution and the laws of the land. They have become armies of the head of state, which are used to fight against perceived internal enemies and critics of the head of state, killing their compatriots in the name of a national security that has become totally conflated with the personal security of the head of state.

Across the African continent, states now wage secret wars against their own

people. The populations of countries like The Gambia have been reduced to the status of prisoners of war (POWs) in their own country. They have no right to question the actions and policies of their government, no right to freely express their opinions, and no right to freely support political organizations of their choice or vote into office candidates of their choice; no right or power to change their government. While many countries have a semblance of multi-party democracy and hold regular elections, the reality is that most opposition parties operate under a constant state of siege and their supporters are perpetually marginalized in the arena of national politics. The ruling party and its supporters are portrayed as the army of good while opposition parties, critics and the private media are branded and treated like enemy forces out to destroy the country in national spaces that have been transformed into virtual battlefields. Security forces that were founded on the excuse of safeguarding the security of the country are now deployed to violate the security of citizens of that same country as if the country and its citizens are two different entities. Governments wage a hidden war against their own people for no other reason than that they disagree with the head of state or choose to exercise their constitutional freedoms, especially the freedoms of expression and association.

A classic example of Africa's hidden wars has been raging on in The Gambia since 1994. There, a military-turned-civilian dictator who still says "I am a soldier" has perfected the art of war against his critics, journalists, human rights activists and opposition parties. Yahya Jammeh has reduced the Gambian constitution into a mere useless piece of paper and spits upon the very notion of the rule of law. For him, concepts like human rights and democracy represent nothing but cancerous vestiges of a malicious colonialism that should not be allowed to infect the nation-body. He makes no secret of the fact that elections will never remove him from power. And so whether elections are held or not, whether he loses elections or not, he seems certain that with the security forces firmly on his side ready to battle and kill those segments of Gambian society he considers enemy forces out to destabilize the country, he will remain in power. The activities of the National Intelligence Agency and his personal death squad – the so-called Jugulars or Black Black Boys – lend credence to the notion that he is indeed waging a war against the Gambian people. Those citizens who dare to criticize him or question his actions openly are either murdered in cold blood, as happened to Deyda Hydara, or they simply disappear into thin air, as happened recently to Imam Baba Leigh, and as has happened to innocent victims like Chief Ebrima Manneh and many others. Peacefully demonstrating school children are gunned down in cold blood; outspoken media houses are forcibly shut down or subjected to nocturnal arson attacks – as happened to *Citizen FM* and *The Independent* newspaper. The rest of the population is perpetually terrorized by constant threats and warnings, tales of horrendous killings, disappearances, arbitrary arrests, unexplained dismissals, and the ubiquitous informers that now infest every nook and cranny of Gambian society. And so the country is infused with dread of their own government; people are afraid to mention the name of their own head of state lest they are picked up and tortured or killed.

But gone are the days when Africans could not hit back at warlike states like the Jammeh dictatorship. The advent of the Internet and social media means that those unjustly attacked and victimized by African dictators can now fight back with their voices and their pens. Critics and opponents of African dictators who have been forced into exile resort to the use of online blogs and websites to launch their counter attacks against African dictators. Social media outlets like Facebook and Tweeter spread messages of protest and help galvanize the struggle against political impunity and the political war mongering of African dictators. Having unleashed warfare on their own people, they have now become sitting ducks for the cyber missiles relentlessly launched against their persons and policies. Dictators are not only assaulted on the policy front through editorials and commentaries, and exposed through news stories about their activities – real or imagined – they are also ridiculed and mocked in ways that cannot fail to deliver stunning and stupefying blows against their psyches. And while these dictators try anything from uttering verbal threats, hacking emails, and blocking websites, to erasing offensive video footage, they are ultimately on the losing end of Africa's hidden wars.

(7 March 2013)

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Intellectuals and the African Condition

The African condition is desperate and ugly. African intellectuals know this. What are they doing about it? These old but perennially new realities were the recent subject of a series of articles and a panel discussion on *Kairo News*. One of the pieces published by *Kairo News* was an open letter to African intellectuals in which the writer seemed to wonder what African intellectuals working in international educational and other institutions are doing about the desperate situation in their own native backyard.

What seemed to escape critical scrutiny in the conversations on *Kairo News* was whether we might consider all educated persons intellectuals, or whether the title intellectual may only be applied to certain educated persons and not others. This question has been widely debated by writers on the subject ranging from Julien Benda (1928), Ernest Gellner (1990), and Edward Said (1994) among many others. In this small reflection, we draw inspiration from Said's thoughts on the subject.

In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Edward Said (pronounced sayid) characterizes the intellectual as simply that educated person – “an oppositional figure” - who speaks out against injustices in his or her society and ‘whose public

performances can neither be predicted nor compelled into some slogan, orthodox party line, or fixed dogma". The intellectual is not merely one who has obtained an advanced degree in a particular field of study. They have to be someone actively engaged in speaking truth to power in the service of their society and those who are not able to fight back when bullied by the power structures of society. Said's characterization of the intellectual disqualifies many educated persons from claiming the status of intellectual. An intellectual in Said's formulation cannot afford NOT to take sides – be on the side of the underdogs - in national discourses of power, oppression, and exploitation. The Saidian intellectual is vocal and openly on the side of the oppressed masses and in total opposition to the oppressive individuals, structures and institutions of society.

According to Said, the true intellectual is a lonely outsider, an exile to mainstream society, even if they physically live within their own country. The intellectual is marginal to whatever public he or she finds him/herself in. Ironically, the marginality of the intellectual derives precisely from his or her total immersion in society and his or her unwavering and uncompromising engagement with national mission. At once marginal to society, the true intellectual is perpetually embedded, energized and motivated by his or her engagement with issues of social concern. It is his or her hatred of injustice, his or her total identification with the plight of the poor, the weak, the oppressed and the otherwise powerless victims of structural violence that at once makes him/her an outsider and the quintessential insider and champion of social justice. Unable to partake of the ordinary joys of belonging, the intellectual nevertheless resides in the epicentre of belonging. It is this total belonging that makes the intellectual an unyielding, uncompromising advocate of a just social order.

In Said's formulation, educated people who keep mute over the injustices inflicted upon their compatriots or who join and actively serve the oppressive political structure may also be writing and publishing many books and articles in academic presses and learned professional journals. However, because they either passively or actively condone or aid tyrannies and injustices in their home countries, they are ineligible for the title of intellectual. These kinds of educated people, Said suggests, are mere academics or professionals contributing to the production of knowledge in their fields or otherwise serving their narrow professional and personal interests. By their abstinence from critically engaging the tyrannical system or their active participation in the tyrannical power structure, these educated people actively participate, if by default, in the heartless destruction of their own people. Said suggests that the intellectual cannot afford to be either part of an oppressive structure or quietly sit on the proverbial fence in the face of injustice or aggression.

Every moderately schooled African knows that most African political systems are broken, utterly dysfunctional, and perpetually tottering on the brink of ignoble collapse. The utterly broken, dysfunctional and nauseatingly amoral states that preside over these broken systems survive only by tightly squeezing the nation in one fist and using the other fist to brandish the trigger-happy gun and the grave-like jail as evidence of unquestionable national ownership. The typical African

state is powerless and impotent in the face of all the challenges that matter. It is unable to lift its people out of poverty. It feels helpless in the face of a growing mountain of foreign debt, of budget deficits, of scarcities of medicine and other basic commodities, of sky-rocketing inflation, and of a growing population of depraved citizens whose young are so desperate that they risk drowning in the Mediterranean to reach a Europe of illusory ease and plenty.

Paradoxically, these same weak African states function within their national borders as bone-chilling leviathans, so brutal and merciless that citizens are afraid to mention their name in public. The national voice is reduced to an embarrassing monotone of untruths about the nonexistent virtues of the brutal leviathan. Under such circumstances as we have in Africa today, the nation is constantly belittled and bullied by a state that has no conception of national mission. The tragic comedy is that all the bullying, all the destruction is inflicted by the state in the name of national mission. The bully state swears by national mission. It callously poses as a personification of the national mission. It constantly squeaks and roars that only over its dead body can anyone prevent it from actualizing the national mission which, incidentally, totally requires that it stays in power. The educated African, whose senses cannot but be perpetually assailed by the outrageous transgressions of the African state has at least one key question to answer: Why are you not doing anything about it?

The answer most educated Africans would quickly utter in response to this key question is that they are not interested in politics. The implication, of course, is that politics is a dirty game in which they are too clean to engage. What is there to be gained from getting involved in politics? They ask. To justify their abstinence they reduce the entire national crisis - brutal leviathan, hostage nation and guilty moral conscience - to the question of getting involved in politics which, conventional fallacy has it, should best be avoided by all means necessary. Having thus repressed their natural inclination to do something, they convince themselves that they are merely decent citizens sitting on the fence. They forget that being part of the nation, every fence they sit on is inevitably located smack in the middle of the national presence. The national presence could never be diminished or excluded from citizen consciousness. It can never be ignored either. There is no sitting on the fence when it comes to being part of a nation, however geographically removed you are from your native soil. It's like staring at the blazing sun with your eyes tightly shut: you still see red and feel the heat.

Of course, some of the worst atrocities against human kind both in Africa and around the world have been committed by people who would characterize themselves as intellectuals. Almost all of Africa's founding fathers held advanced academic qualifications ranging from masters degrees to PhDs. Yet, their most glaring legacy is "Africa 2015", a continent of unimaginable poverty and misery, a people set far below the rest of the world's peoples in almost all aspects of life that matter. A people prostrate under the burdens of poverty, disease, and political oppression and conflict; a perpetually hungry people. One can understand that our so-called founding fathers were faced with a particularly difficult task of leading new nations within the context of an impersonal and exploitative capitalist world system,

and at the height of a cold war that threatened to sabotage Africa's emergent independence. But as Africans faced with a particularly malignant problem of unjust rulers, we cannot afford to overlook injustices and oppression merely because the perpetrator has also made great contributions to the advancement of society. Under no circumstances may acts of injustice and oppression be condoned, ignored, or glossed over especially when they are perpetrated by "intellectuals" who should know better than to assume positions of infallibility. There are always alternative ways of doing things, alternative choices to be made which may achieve the same or better results.

Most African leaders hold higher education qualifications that place them firmly in the category of Africa's top intellectuals. Yet, most of them willfully impose unjust social orders on their societies simply by refusing to recognize that they could be mistaken in some of their ideas. It is to be said for Tanzania's Julius Nyerere that once he recognized the error of his ways, he stepped aside and allowed an alternative system to replace his failed experiment in *Ujaama* socialism. That is a true mark of a true intellectual – the capacity to recognize error, say sorry, and take corrective action in the interest of national mission. Of course, we also have those African leaders, aka "the greatest pretenders" who, much like cows in a library, pretend to eat the books and attach to their names grandiose titles that suggest Olympian erudition and saintly humaneness even as they use their spiked political hoofs to trample upon viciously and mercilessly crush any signs of true intellectuality in the nation. But in all the areas that matter, in the face of every meaningful national challenge, their giant feet immediately turn to clay, their spiked hoofs into butter pads that melt at the slightest contact with reality.

The true intellectual recognizes above everything else his or her human fallibility. He or she certainly expresses strongly held beliefs and opinions and could prove extremely stubborn in upholding and defending them. But he or she never assumes a position of infallibility and certainly never suggests that his or her version of whatever issue is at stake is the only correct version. He or she always leaves room for the possibility of error, and depending on his or her level of maturity as an intellectual, is always prepared to revisit and revise his or her position in the light of strong evidence suggesting that he or she might be wrong. In short, the true intellectual is a perpetual student, both of academics and of life. One of the greatest intellectuals of all time, the Greek philosopher Socrates, famously confessed that the only thing he knew was that he knew nothing.

The true intellectual will not be co-opted by power structures that bear the tiniest bit of responsibility for human suffering. He or she is utterly incapable of inflicting premeditated injustice except as a response to injustice inflicted upon him or her, or some other victim. In Africa, however, and admittedly in all parts of the world, people who consider themselves intellectuals often serve as the spokespersons and legitimating signposts for oppressive and unjust social orders. Every tyrant has a crop of intellectuals around them, with some others waiting in the wings, licking their boots, and hoping to be co-opted into the system for monetary and other benefits. Some go out of their way to produce works on the tyrant's non-existent achievements, or to praise the tyrant's non-existent magnanimities as a

way of attracting favourable attention and perhaps landing a lucrative job from the tyrant. Because tyrants are generally insecure and have grossly over-inflated egos in constant need of stroking, they are famously addicted to intellectual sycophancy because it confirms their own unrealistic estimations of themselves. Intellectual sycophancy confirms but can never validate the lie that the tyrant tells themselves every day in a bid to escape the pangs of bad conscience. But, if we agree with Said and especially Bender before him, those intellectuals who attach themselves to unjust power structures and corrupt institutions for monetary gain are not true intellectuals; they are mere academics utterly heedless of the lessons of history and neglectful of their rightful roles as citizens. Some of them are victims of self-inflicted mental blindness who assume convenient truths to convince themselves that the only way they could escape what appears to be a life-long cycle of material poverty is to court the favours of the tyrant. Indeed, it is their obsessive preoccupation with material gain that pushes them into the thorny arms of the tyrant and makes them sell their souls to the devil. The true intellectual does not dismiss the necessity of material comfort; but against the exigencies of national mission and the necessities of human dignity, principle and integrity, material comfort pales into utter insignificance in the mind of the true intellectual.

Then there are those intellectuals who will neither sell their souls to the devil nor actively fight the injustices in their society. These seem to be in the majority. Having obtained higher educational qualifications, they are well aware of the nature of structural violence in society. However, they tend to lean more towards silence largely for reasons of self-preservation, cowardice, or mere laziness. African intellectuals belonging to this group are often prolific writers and great scholars working for some of the world's greatest universities or corporate institutions. However, they maintain a stony silence while their own people are bullied and killed by tin pot despots. They place the conveniences of being able to land freely at their home airports and bask in the communal glory that greets them back home to the inconvenience of having to stay out of the country while waging a battle against unjust social orders. They claim to be not interested in politics; yet their entire professions deal with politics, a subject they engage on a daily basis. These are the types of intellectuals the sociologist C Wright Mills call "inactionaries." They convince themselves that they are not doing anything bad, that they are independent beings who have no bone to pick with the unjust system as long as it does not attack them or theirs, or that they are not interested in politics. Assuming these convenient truths, they manage to willfully maintain what they feel is a clear conscience and go about their lucrative business. It is to be said for these inactionaries that they seldom sell their souls to the devil either. It is easier to leave other souls at the devil's mercy.

The true intellectual neither sells his/her soul to the devil nor remains mute over social injustices. Marginal to society, he or she is embedded in a sea of social concerns. His or her entire being is animated and inspired by an irresistible urge to speak out against tyranny and injustice in all their various forms. He or she cannot survive long in an environment of intolerance and censorship. He or she will allow others to control anything about him or her but his or her mind. He/she is a

Baba Galleh Jallow

fiercely independent individual who finds it hard to belong, yet inextricably and almost literally belongs to his or her community. And he or she will not be silenced, except by brute force that renders him or her totally incapable of talking truth to power. Some of the greatest intellectual treasures of all time were produced by intellectuals in prison or on the verge of being murdered by unjust regimes. Within our current Gambian and African context, we can only wish that there are more of these types of intellectuals.

(22 September 2015)

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Abiding fallacies

It is a tragic irony of African history that governments fail to develop their countries simply because they fail to develop their most abundant and most precious resources – their people. Following independence, most African governments physically stifled the development potential of their countries by failing or refusing to appreciate what was obvious to enlightened minds – that the people must always come first. In order to achieve their personal ambitions, be these relevant to the nation or not, African leaders quickly transformed themselves into all-powerful rulers. They demanded perhaps not total personal obeisance so much as total obeisance to what for them was an image of their greatness, their metaphorical relevance to the national project, and their prestige on the global scene or specific parts of it. Some claimed non-alignment even while knowing that to be a chimera in the context of global politics, especially in the context of global cold war politics after independence. In all cases, they acted like all-powerful infallible rulers, not as sincere servant leaders of their people.

Some of these leaders-turned-rulers were erudite ideologues; some were distinguished medical doctors and men of letters. Yet, almost without exception, they

did nothing to change the colonial character of the local state or the social culture of colonial subject hood. Rather than encourage the flowering of the national mind, the growth of an independent mentality and the installment of human dignity as an inviolable cultural treasure, African leaders succumbed and continue to succumb to an inexplicable taste for power. Some clung on to power in the name of vaguely defined and often illusory ideals; others clung on for fear of what might be unearthed after they leave office. And some clung on for all of the above, in addition to lucrative enticements from abroad to keep enemy ideologies out and pursue the ideological interests of foreign countries and not their own countries. Today, certain African rulers parrot the political lyrics of oriental absolutism under the cloak of self-righteous and parochial pseudo-religious humanism. Others ceaselessly utter confused noises about non-existent neo-colonial intrigues and conspiracies merely for their oppressive justificatory potential.

In all cases the people's intellectual energies are stifled, worse than they were under colonial rule. One notices a diminishing pattern of Africa's brilliant human resources in the decades following independence. Under colonial rule, nationalist leaders of all ideological persuasions could criticize and challenge the government; newspapers could protest and condemn the policies of the colonial state. Those so inclined could freely form and register political parties for the express purpose of opposing the colonial state. The colonial state did not want to lose power and did not want to be opposed. But it allowed itself to kneel before the power of public opinion and grant independence. Of course, there were external extenuating circumstances, such as for instance America's insistence on decolonization after World War Two. What is clear today is that the level of political tolerance in colonial Africa was much higher than the level of political tolerance in some independent African countries. The dreams of independence could never be realized because the African people had no time to dream. Hyper-colonial obeisance to the state is insisted upon and those who dare to suggest any possible alternatives to state opinion are neutralized, one way or the other. For some of these voices of reason, exile becomes their theatre of physical existence, though their spirit never leaves home. Others continue to have their say anyway, regardless of what anyone under God does. These people are never out to destroy their country as alleged by oppressive African governments. In fact, they are entirely motivated by a passionate love of country; a love so strong they could never quit the search for political beauty for their country, regardless of potential personal dangers to themselves.

That the voice of the people is the voice of God is a popular mantra in the mouths of many African leaders. Sadly, it is often just that – a popular mantra that makes it much easier to justify anything and everything you do or want to do. In colonial Africa, it was the mantra the imperial state had to listen to, in spite of itself. In post-colonial Africa, it is the mantra the independent state uses to justify its brutal oppression of critical public opinion. The independent African state fails to realize that unlike the colonial state, it is not there to rule the people but to empower the people effectively so the people can rule themselves. The African state fails to realize that the idea of building up Africa from above and as

an entity separate from its builders was among the major defining protestations of imperialism, until at least, the onset of so-called developmental colonialism after 1945. Under pressure to leave Africa, European imperial powers like Britain set in motion processes designed to turn their colonies into self-governing entities. African nationalist agitation flourished in the late forties and fifties and independence bequeathed to Africa a rich crop of intellectual giants, highly motivated and nationalistic professionals, and a vibrant population ready to rise up to the challenges of independent nation-hood.

Sadly, the governments and leaders that took over from the colonial state literally laid to waste this rich indigenous intellectual potential waiting to be put to good use. Newspapers, politicians and scholars who dared to suggest that there might have been an error on a government policy or action were systematically and deliberately silenced. The political divide that characterized the colonial body politic is physically reproduced as the state now insists upon identifying, naming, shaming, and silencing political critics and opponents. Society is divided into friends of the state and enemies of the state. It did not matter whether the opinions and ideas of these brilliant minds were essential to the very survival of the nation-state. What mattered was that they were not in line with what the government - often personified in the leader - is saying or doing at the material time. The ideas of brilliant men like Ngugi Wa Thiong'o landed him in prison and eventually exile. In Ghana, an erudite sage in the person of Dr J. B. Danquah was allowed to languish in jail and die of heart failure under preventive detention, despite repeated personal pleas to be released on the grounds that he was being unjustly held, but also on medical, humanitarian, even religious grounds. In Guinea, Diallo Telli was imprisoned and deliberately starved to death under Sekou Toure's "Black Diet" treatment. In Gambia, Baboucarr Gaye was silenced and his *Citizen FM* radio confiscated because he translated the local newspapers for the national edification of the non-English reading Gambian people; and they loved it! The mild mannered and highly principled Deyda Hydara was gunned down for advising caution in the conduct of human affairs. His voice never rose beyond a calm and emphatic iteration that it is in the supreme interest of all human beings - especially those in power - to always act justly. Much more than the colonial state, independent African governments fear the power (which is to say the nourishing beauty) of ideas and suppress their countries' intellectual resources in the name of ever failing "development plans" and fantastic "visions" without practical foundations.

It is no wonder that in many African countries, vision years quietly pass while the vision still hangs on the wall. The good thing is that it is never mentioned in public again as if it never existed at all. Not to worry, there is always room on the wall for more vision abundant foods or vision super powers. The hungry people are asked to just be loyal; the government is coming to solve all their problems if they are seen to be loyal. They must not be impatient and must not worry too much about the hunger. The government has just issued vision end the hunger and the government will make sure that they do not remain hungry beyond vision year. Vision years come and go and the people are still asked to be loyal and not to worry; there are still more visions on the way. And as for that one-percent who

wants to destroy the country, they will be shown that the voice of the people is the voice of God.

A study of African governments is a study in mind-boggling political circuses that often make absolutely no sense, not even to the actors themselves, not to say their circus animals – the unquestioningly loyal crowds. In these circuses, the leader is the most powerful, in some cases the **ONLY** powerful actor. A colossal giant and whip master of the political sort, the leaders looms large over everybody else, and deadly whip in hand, smashing down anyone who dares to get out of step with established state practice, even if such practice is destroying the country. The giant circus master cracks his whip left, right and centre, anyhow he wishes, striking down anyone who pricks his fancy, regardless of their location within the ring or whether they are in fact the prop holders of the circus tent. Even the audience is not spared frequent lashes for its natural attention to what is going on.

It is high time (to parody Dr J. B. Danquah) that African governments submitted to the selectively unpleasant reality that development is about people, not things. Development as people is unpleasant only to a state more concerned with its personal interests, than with the wider historical and cultural interests of the people. Yes, the voice of the people is the Voice of God. But what use is the voice of the people if it is never heard or never listened to? What use loud and frequent references to the Voice of God when it is never heeded by the proclaimers themselves?

As The Gambia emerges from the clutches of one of Africa's most banal dictatorships, we must insist that our people are our most precious and useful resources and make the case that no viable development can happen without the active and intelligent development and participation of our people. The culture of intolerance and the repression of our people's mental energies must be buried with the fallen dictatorial regime. Freedom of expression and association, and the active encouragement of human creativity must be the defining characteristics of the new Gambia, if we must transcend the obstacles that have arrested our development since independence.

(26 June 2016)

21

The disengaged public

African publics are generally disengaged from the politics of their countries. Paradoxically, they are also generally saddened by the politics of their countries. This paradox seems to affirm the view that if you do not get involved with politics, politics will still get involved with you. In other words, human beings are essentially political beings. Among the majority of Africans, including a large section of modern-day intellectuals, politics is shrugged off as really not that important, as a dirty game, as something that just has to be endured.

Since Africans cannot really ignore their national politics, and since African politics are generally unpleasant to contemplate, most Africans go about their daily business carrying around a sad sense of *déjà vu* when it comes to what their government is saying or doing. They are beset by a pervading sense of helplessness and often do not bother to join whatever little effort there is to remedy the situation, either by speaking out, acting, encouraging, or acknowledging those who do speak out and/or act. The majority of this silent majority ascribes government to God and patiently wait for the arrival of God's will to change the government, however desperate their situation, however unjust and tyrannical their government.

African publics' disengagement with their national politics has its roots in colonial space. The colonial state stood African civic cultures on their head by totally shifting the locus and source of political power from the people to their rulers. European colonial policies demanded total obedience and compliance from African publics through African rulers that they either installed or tolerated. The preoccupations of African rulers were reduced to the task of helping the colonial state rule her African subjects, have them pay taxes and do colonial labour as and when required. African rulers were often allowed to form their own police units and build their own prisons for those of their people who would dare to question their authority or the authority of the colonial overlords. Where rulers were held accountable by their people before European hegemony, they now dared anyone to question any of their words and actions, however manifestly unjust and destructive. The ugly phenomenon lives on in many present-day African rulers, some very close to the home.

In postcolonial Africa, the people remain powerless because power never shifted back to its precolonial source and location in society. The men who took over from the colonial authorities chanted songs of freedom and popular empowerment, and energized and mobilized their people in the struggle for independence. But once independence was gained, freedom and popular empowerment were placed at the bottom of national priorities where over half a century later, they still languish. In a majority of cases, independence was understood to be coterminous with the departure of the colonialists, the transfer of political power from white hands to black hands, and nothing much else; certainly not the freedom and popular empowerment in whose name independence was sought, often violently fought for, and won.

Following independence, the people were consulted only for their validation of the new rulers. Their votes were solicited at election times, when they were reminded of the heroic victory of the new rulers over the old, how they were all freed from foreign domination. They were told they now owned themselves and were nobody's slaves. And they were told to be grateful and loyal to the rulers that God had given to them. Those who thought otherwise were branded and continue to be branded agents of the old rulers whose imaginary insidious plots to enslave the people again would never materialize. Unlike foreign slave masters, Africans now had local slave masters who would not beat them up too badly unless they "misbehaved" by refusing to be "patriotic" citizens whose defining characteristic was total obeisance to the new rulers. They were often reminded and continue to be reminded to this day that only God could effect a change of ruler which, given their unchanging circumstances, was really not too hard for the people to believe. The new African rulers proved more powerful than the old colonial rulers and practised a politics that rendered the people even more removed from their governments. Africa is one continent that bears the dubious distinction of replacing colonial rule with a worse kind of indigenous rule; a continent better off in 1960 than it is in 2015.

African diaspora communities are more or less equally disengaged from their national politics. Those Africans, who travel outside the continent as economic

migrants, are more interested in earning a living and sometimes supporting their families and relatives back home than they are in how badly their government behaves. Thousands of Diaspora Africans remain mute and seemingly indifferent unless and until they or a close relative or family member gets into trouble with the rulers. At that point, they would join the verbal struggle against the bad rulers either momentarily or permanently. This pattern of behaviour is also seen among the African intellectual Diaspora. The majority of educated Africans in the Diaspora maintain a stony silence over the ugly politics of their countries. While unavoidably angry and / or sad at the sorry state of their national politics, at the outrageous antics of their rulers and governments, many educated Africans remain publicly disengaged from the politics of their countries.

The minority of Africans both at home and in the Diaspora who find their home politics sufficiently unbearable to speak out or advocate for political change find themselves in a very lonely and hostile space. They have to contend with a malignant state, mentally blind state loyalists, indifferent audiences and cynical detractors. They draw inspiration to continue speaking and/or acting only from a deep-seated sense of duty and a conviction that disengagement from their national politics is simply not an option.

(12 October 2015)

22

Dollar Power: Jammeh's sinister plan for a single party state

Traditionally, African dictators have imposed single-party states either by issuing an order banning all other parties, or by passing laws in obsequious parliaments legitimizing the imposition of single party states. Gambia's Yahya Jammeh, who has fast assumed the status of Africa's most callous dictator, has devised a novel and particularly sinister plot designed to turn the country into a single party state in all but name. We may call his sinister method Dollar Power – the imposition of exorbitant fees for all who desire to seek political office in The Gambia.

According to a report published in the online version of The Standard newspaper of 17 June 2015, the country's Independent Electoral Commission is proposing an amendment to the Elections Act to the Gambian National Assembly that will increase the required deposit for aspiring presidential candidates from 10, 000 dalasis to one million dalasis. According to Hamat Bah, leader of the National Reconciliation Party, the proposed amendment also increases the deposit for National Assembly candidates from 5000 to 100,000 dalasis, the deposit for mayoral candidates from 2500 to 25000 dalasis and the deposit for council ward candidates

from 1250 to 10000 dalasi. What these particular amendments mean is that only a very rich party, such as the ruling APRC, can potentially afford to contest the elections, at least the presidential and National Assembly elections. One doubts whether any of the existing opposition parties in The Gambia possesses the dollar power to fund their presidential, parliamentary and all other candidates under this regime in the upcoming 2016 general elections.

There is absolutely no doubt that the Independent Electoral Commission's draconian amendment proposals come directly from Yahya Jammeh. This not only confirms that the Electoral Commission is directly under the control of Yahya Jammeh, it also shows the extent of Jammeh's callousness in dealing with dissenting Gambian citizens. Since imposing the single party state through executive decree or an act of the National Assembly could potentially spark riots against him, Jammeh is using dollar power to elbow everyone else out of The Gambia's electoral politics. There is little doubt that the proposed amendments will be approved by the APRC controlled National Assembly.

One wonders whether the leadership of other political parties in The Gambia will allow this sinister plot to proceed as planned by Yahya Jammeh. One hopes that they will not. In the event they want to oppose and defeat this sinister conspiracy, they might consider three (or more) courses of action. They could file a suit in the Gambian courts and hope for a miracle judgement in their favour. They could mobilize their supporters and stage mass protests against the sinister plot. Or they could create a temporary coalition, pool their resources, and finance their candidates for the 2016 elections under the new draconian electoral dispensation. It seems to me that the coalition option is particularly appealing and stands a very good chance of ending the dictatorship of Yahya Jammeh.

While there might be other issues that have prevented the emergence of a comprehensive political coalition against the Jammeh dictatorship, one has a sense that one of the biggest sticking points is the issue of who leads the coalition. I suggest that this particular obstacle may be removed if the parties can agree to select an independent candidate for the primary purpose of defeating Jammeh, to serve a maximum period of one or two years or whatever time is agreed upon, and during this time to oversee a comprehensive regime of electoral and other reforms. The coalition leadership will then oversee the conduct of an election in which the individual constitutive party leaders will contest. We hope and pray that our political leaders will consider this coalition – or other viable options – seriously in the event that the IEC's proposed amendments are approved by the National Assembly, which in reality is Yahya Jammeh's personal assembly.

(17 June 2015)

23

From prezidom to family nation

Unlike Africa's current nation-state system, the chiefdoms, kingdoms and empires that existed in precolonial Africa had fluid boundaries that expanded or contracted depending on the power or weakness of their central governments. Some of them had wise rulers who treated their subjects in a kind and caring manner. Some had cruel and unwise rulers who terrorized their subjects, at their own peril, of course. European imperialism disrupted these traditional African political formations, redrew the map of Africa, and invented a coterie of colonies that morphed into Africa's current nation-state system at independence. Ironically, in some parts of Africa today, the nation-state is ruled as if it were a precolonial African kingdom and its citizens treated like the subjects of an unwise and cruel ruler of the precolonial sort.

It is a sad truth that in certain African countries, the president's name evokes images of brutality and instils fear in the hearts of citizens. Some African heads of state have in effect moulded themselves into what we might call "a Prezidom" – part constitutional president of a nation-state, part absolutist ruler of a precolonial kingdom. The Prezidom is always confused because it finds that it cannot be a constitutional president and an absolute monarch at the same time. The dilemma

is often expressed in random pseudo-constitutional and neo-absolutist utterances that bear little resemblance to reality. It is as if the Prezidom is perpetually trying and failing to turn into an unreal political creature in the nation-state. Nevertheless, it forcefully assumes the “right” to own the country and everybody’s lives with it. Under the Prezidom the sovereign citizens of a nation-state are subjectified, their voices are stifled, their choices proscribed, and ultimately, their human dignity nullified.

But while the majority of Africans are chillingly compliant in the face of the strange Prezidom, a significant minority recognizes and detests its outrageous injustices and is determined to fight it, if necessary through the use of force. The ubiquity of the Prezidom in Africa explains why the continent has had such a large number of military coups, attempted coups and putsches since independence. Yet, the African Prezidom habitually fails to admit or address the causes of these violent outbursts. A string of vitriolic rhetoric always follows these abortive coups, spiced with hostile threats of hell and damnation for anyone who dares to challenge the Prezidom or question its claim to personal ownership of the country, and its “right” to do as it pleases with the lives of the people. In The Gambia, the citizens are frequently reminded that the Prezidom will be Prezidom for as long as it likes, and if they don’t like it they can go to hell. One man assumes the “right” to own a country shared by millions and to do with the lives of everybody else as he pleases, and damns the consequences. Injustice assumes the “right” to be justice, and damn the consequences. No wonder some Gambians are so angry that they are advocating the right to own guns in a post-Jammeh Gambia.

Commenting on one of my recent pieces published on Kairo News, “Maxs” a Gambian justifiably angry at the Jammeh Prezidom’s unjust treatment of Imam Cherno Gassama wrote: “I wish Gambians are armed like Americans so that citizens will be able to defend themselves against the tyrant and its oppressive forces. The next government must ensure that there is legislation which gives the right to every citizen to bear arms as USA’s second amendment right does. This will ensure that never in the history of our country will we have a tyrant as a leader who will oppress citizens.” He wrote that the best way to “empower defenceless and oppressed people is to empower them to bear arms to protect themselves from excessive abuse of tyrannical government. I believe if Mr. Gassama was armed, he would not be kidnapped without fighting back. . . . Until then we are a nation of cowards” Of course, no one can blame “Maxs” for being angry. Why should Imam Gassama be arbitrarily arrested and locked up for eight months without charges, without trial, without any public explanation, and without access to his family? It seems as if in its interactions with Imam Gassama, the Jammeh Prezidom treated him as if he were a lifeless object to be simply picked up and dumped in jail, without any regard to his humanity or his status as the respected Imam of a whole community. Political activities of this nature naturally make some people feel that an eye for an eye is a fair policy, even though it makes everybody blind.

While I fully respected his right to his opinion on gun ownership in post-Jammeh Gambia, I could not help responding in a short thank-you note to “Maxs” that in my opinion, the Jammeh era should not be followed by a gun culture of

the American kind, but by a culture of enlightened and empowered citizenship in which the government knows itself to be and operates as a diligent and respectful child of the nation, beholden to the wishes of its parents, the people; all of the people. What Gambians should aspire to is not the American gun culture, but a culture of peace, political civility, and unity in diversity whose defining characteristic will be respect for the human person, the inviolable sanctity of human dignity and the rule of law, and in which no tyranny is possible because the people are politically enlightened and empowered, and will remove their government through popular power if it fails. Yes, many Gambians are afraid of the Jammeh Prezidom; but that is not because they are a nation of cowards, but because they have not recognized and assumed their real status as the supreme power in the land. A politically enlightened and empowered people will not allow themselves to be oppressed. Dictatorship, especially of the famous “developmental” kind, cannot persist in a politically enlightened and empowered society. The people will make you jippo, and if you don’t like it you can try going to heaven.

We recall that as part of its report to the AFPRC [Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council], the National Consultative Committee had recommended the establishment of a civic education council to help raise the political awareness of the Gambian people. Since he had “accepted” the NCC’s recommendations, Jammeh duly appointed a civic education council without any serious thought or planning. No wonder within a very short period, the so-called civic education council died an unnatural death: it simply stopped talking and disappeared. The planning and implementation of a serious civic education institution cannot be left in the hands of any single person; it has to be a collective, well thought-out and ongoing process of experimentation and exploration. It will require serious reflection and brainstorming by a panel of social scientists, humanists, economists, and other experts. Happily, there exists a wealth of Gambianist expertise that could be tapped to do the job.

We have argued before that Gambians can attain the political enlightenment and empowerment they need through the agency of the nation as school, the Nation School, whose primary goal will be to transform small Gambia into one big family, a Family Nation. The Nation School project will facilitate the honest political education of all Gambians, young and old, enhance a healthy culture of civility on all matters of general public interest, and promote the idea and enhance the transformation of our small country into one big traditional Gambian family, a Family Nation, in which the people are the parents, the government the children. Inevitably, transforming Gambia into a Nation School and Family Nation requires an enlightened leadership, a state that will serve not only as a government, but also as a professional, dedicated and well organized educational institution whose primary role is to facilitate and enhance the rigorous political education of the people. Through a sustained process of proper political enlightenment and empowerment, Gambians will learn to assume their rightful status as the ultimate custodians of political power and authority in the land, and the government will learn to assume its proper status as a loyal servant, not an all-powerful master of the people.

The fact that most Gambians have not attained any level of formal western

education is not an obstacle to their proper political education. Because some Gambians cannot read the constitution in English does not mean that they cannot understand its provisions if these are carefully explained to them in their own languages. They will fully understand every section, every subsection, every clause, and every nuance of their country's constitution if these are carefully explained to them in their own languages. They will understand the doctrines of popular sovereignty, parliamentary democracy, the separation of powers, the independence of the judiciary, the writ of habeas corpus and any other jurisprudential concept or legal instrument affecting their lives, if these are carefully explained to them in their own languages by well qualified professionals.

Gambians need no foreign language to understand that President and Mansa (king) are similar concepts but totally incompatible institutions. They can be easily made to understand that *Mansa* – whether of the *Babili* (Bridge Building) sort or the *Njatigi* (Patron) sort – is as extinct as the *Ninki Nanka* (dragon), even though there are frequent reported sightings of a similar creature bellowing fire from its mouth and nostrils across the country. Gambians need no foreign language to understand that long ago, independence ended the colonial Mansa Kunda and replaced it with a Nation State in which the people are more powerful than their government. Their compliant Mansa mentality and all its damaging baggage can be rectified by exposing and explaining the chronic anomaly between current political realities and outdated political practices and perceptions that the Prezidom willfully perpetuates in order to hang on to power.

Gambians need no foreign language to understand that the police man has no right to slap them, or to stop their car, seize their driver's licence, and go sit angrily somewhere waiting for some begging and a bribe. Gambians need to understand that all monies spent by their government come from their own pockets, not the government's; from taxes they pay, loans contracted in their names, which they and their progeny have to repay, gifts given to them through their government, or contracts signed and deals made in their name. The nation school project can effectively educate our people on these and all other matters political they need to know, in their own languages, and in a manner that would enhance their political enlightenment and empowerment, and lead to the transformation of our small Gambia into one big Gambian family, a Family Nation in which the people are the parents, the government the children.

One has a sense that the nation school project can be implemented through an Institute for Gambian Studies. Staffed by suitably qualified professionals and faculty, this Institute will design and offer courses on Gambian Studies to both university students in a classroom setting and to the entire nation via regular live programmes on national radio and television. Through the Institute for Gambian Studies, the entire country can be transformed into an open university in which Gambians are continuously educated on both domestic and international issues according to a well-designed curriculum, well-structured syllabi and a sustained process of lectures and discussions on national radio and television, and at community forums. Gambians will be given lessons on their national constitution, on the concepts of citizenship and the rule of law, on the nature of the nation-state

– its historical roots, its philosophical foundations, the limits of state power and authority – and on many other issues. Through the agency of the nation school, Gambian society will be transformed into one big family of relatives who may disagree or even quarrel and fight over politics, but who will always observe the highest standards of fair play and civility on all matters of general public concern.

All Gambian children should also be effectively socialized in the political culture of empowered citizenship in the nation-state from as early an age as may be considered suitable. In addition to being taught at the college and adult national levels, Gambian Studies should be made compulsory at all elementary and secondary schools, public and private. Gambian children should graduate from high school with a reasonable knowledge of their national constitution and the basic laws governing their lives, their rights and responsibilities as citizens. They should graduate with a reasonable knowledge of the concepts of parliamentary democracy, the separation of powers, independence of the judiciary, term limits for the presidency, and respect for human rights and the rule of law. Of course, for all Gambian children to be politically educated there will need to be a system of free and compulsory education in The Gambia. And there can be that, at least through high school, if the country's resources, however limited, are channeled in the proper direction.

We are confident that well-meaning international organizations and various centres and institutes for constitutional studies and peace and democracy studies around the world will be only too happy and willing to assist in building the kind of new society we envisage. If Gambia declares itself a Nation School and is seen to be genuinely aspiring towards becoming a Family Nation, we will have a rich fund of international goodwill and support to draw upon. Organizations like the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Institute, and the National Democratic Institute are just a few among many whose resources may be tapped to fund the Nation School and Family Nation projects. Of course, we recognize the very important need to preserve our cherished cultural norms, values and identities from undue erosion by the influx of “foreign cultural influences”. But we also know that what we aspire to is the enhancement of human dignity, which is as native to Gambians as it is to every human community.

(20 July 2016)

24

Why America works and Gambia not...

How did Gambians feel watching Republican candidate Mitt Romney walk up to the mike at his subdued campaign headquarters on the night of November 6, 2012 and graciously concede defeat in the 2012 presidential elections? Perhaps some sense of relief that America, in spite of its great mass of ugliness, does have some extremely beautiful aspects that cannot but be the envy of the world, especially those parts of the world where conceding electoral defeat is almost unheard of and where political grace is displayed only in its patronizing, bullish manifestation, as if it were a favour to be conferred and not a virtue to be cultivated and shared. It was at once humbling and gratifying to watch a man who had spent so much energy and resources of all kind walk right up to the mike, in front of TV cameras and congratulate another man who, only a few hours earlier, had been his bitterest political opponent. And Romney conceded defeat graciously, even praying for Obama to succeed in his new role as President of the United States. This is what putting country before self looks and feels like. And this is a huge part of why America works.

It would be simplistic, however, to suggest that Romney conceded defeat merely because he is a gracious man, or merely because he puts country before self. These, of course, are to some extent true. But there is a bigger force than Romney or any single American that dictated Romney's decision to concede defeat graciously in these elections: That force is the American people – a people who are politically literate and who will hold their leaders accountable for whatever they do or fail to do. The American state is one that was built by the people and that continues to be sustained by the people. This is quite the opposite of what obtains in Africa where the state was put in place by a small group of people serving imperial interests and where, with very few exceptions, the state continues to be made up of a small group of people mostly serving their own interests.

The 2012 elections in America were certainly the most fiercely contested in a long time. Right wing hatred of America's Black president became personified and vocalized through the agency of men like Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck and Donald Trump, and through institutions like the Tea Party and Fox News, among many others, some visible, most invisible. America's crop of wealthy racists sponsored Super PACs that invested hundreds of millions of dollars into the GOP campaign machinery while less wealthy racists swelled the ranks of the Tea Party and formed all manner of racist organizations devoted to "taking our country back" as if they were the only ones who could claim ownership of the United States. In the U.S. Congress, racist members swore to make sure that their dear America would not be headed for another four years by Barack Obama, not because Obama is a bad president, in spite of protestations to the contrary, but because Obama is a Black President and the idea of a Black President of the United States is just intolerable to America's racists. Republican members of Congress grew so obstructionist as to be almost subversive of the country they profess to love so much. They did and said everything they could to make sure that the first Obama administration failed so that he would be ineligible for a second term. And during the months and weeks leading up to the elections, they did everything they could to drive the Black President out of the White House. Happily, racist America remains in the minority in almost all of the states that matter most – those states with the highest number of electoral votes. And so Obama got re-elected with at least a margin of 100 electoral votes as of election night. For a brief moment after CNN projected that Obama had been re-elected, it seemed as if Romney would refuse to concede defeat. His campaign actually said he was not ready to concede, that they were crunching the Ohio numbers. But with Colorado declared for Obama moments later, Romney knew he had to throw in the towel or risk facing the wrath of the American people. One feels pretty certain that if Obama had lost the election as clearly as Romney did, he would have readily conceded defeat rather than risk the wrath of the American people. Both Jimmy Carter and George Bush senior were incumbents when they lost the election, and they had to vacate the White House without any particular prompting other than the scary prospect of incurring the wrath of the American people.

Contrast this scenario to what obtains in a country like The Gambia, for instance, where Yahya Jammeh declares that the ballot could never take him out

of office even before the vote was cast. Jammeh is able to make such insulting statements because he, and not the Gambian people, is the repository of power and thus the object of fear. The balance of power between state and nation, between government and people is so terribly skewed that it is generally taken for granted that the state is all-powerful and the people all-powerless. The possibility that people could even object to the words and actions of the head of state is diminished to near oblivion. Here, the state arrogates to itself the right to erase the agency of the people as political actors by forcefully equating its own interests completely with the interests of the nation and daring anyone to question the validity of that fallacious assumption. The entire nation is held hostage to the barrel of the gun and the malicious whims of a head of state who has no conception of himself as beholden to anything but his own selfish interests. When Gambian tyrant Yahya Jammeh declares that he is afraid of no one but God, he is precisely saying that all power in the country is vested in him, and that the people, the true repositories of political power, are in fact completely without any political power. This lie is given a semblance of truth by the deployment of merciless state repression against all perceived or real critics and opponents, and by the practice of hiring and firing people as frequently as he deems fit to serve his own interests. In Jammeh's Gambia, the president can fire any one from their government position, have anyone arrested and locked up, ban any media house, or seize any business or private property without as much as the blink of an eye because the people have been so thoroughly emasculated of political power as to believe that they have absolutely no claim or right to political power and no say in the conduct of their own national affairs.

Gambia's salvation lies in the empowerment of the Gambian people precisely in the manner that the American people are empowered. It is not a question of emulating America or any other nation on earth. It is the reality that within the context of the nation state system that prevails in America as in Gambia, political power belongs rightfully to the people. But the people can only wield this power if they are aware in the first place that they own this power. Most African governments are well aware of this fact, although in pursuit of their selfish interests and their insatiable greed for self-aggrandizement and their sweet tooth for power, they force themselves to live under a self-imposed ignorance regarding this fact. The tragedy of the African condition is that the modern state is not one built by the people but one imposed on the people by the colonizing project of imperial Europe. This tragedy is worsened because the state that took over from the imperial project did not see fit to bring into being an empowered and politically enlightened people. Rather, the state has consistently been happy to pull the political blinders over the eyes of the people and to perpetuate the myth of the absolute power of the state and the absolute powerlessness of the people. Elections are projected and seen as a practice in the expression of political gratitude to the rich and powerful, not as a practice in the exercise of popular sovereignty - the people's political power. America works because the people of America are conscious of their power and no actors in the American state - whether it's a Romney or an Obama - is so foolhardy as to contemplate the mere possibility of testing the reality of that power. Gambia will not work until the Gambian people become conscious of their power

Baba Galleh Jallow

and make it impossible for political actors to pretend or act otherwise. The revolution that will set Gambia free from despotism is therefore above everything else, a Mind revolution that will place political power firmly in the hands of the people to exercise and defend as they deem fit.

(8 November 2012)

PART TWO
PEOPLE POWER
The turning tide

25

Looking beyond the power-grab

Every revolution is inspired by outrage; outrage at the spectre of a small minority in power oppressing a large majority of citizens. Outrage at gross injustices and often unbelievable socio-economic and cultural hardships majorities endure under oppressive political regimes. Revolutions succeed not only to the extent that they are also inspired by a burning desire to empower politically the powerless majority so that never again will they be oppressed by a minority, but also to the extent that they genuinely follow through and actualize such popular empowerment. The nation always bears within itself the resources requisite for its own empowerment.

Revolutions fail to the extent that they fail to look sufficiently forward. They fail to the extent that they miss the need to look carefully beyond the moment of empowerment and critically engage the challenging idea of what comes next, of how do we fix this. They fail to the extent that they loudly talk of what they have come to fix and how to fix it, but give little thought to the practical challenges involved or how to overcome them sensibly in order to actualize what they proclaim as their

mission. Revolutions fail when at the moment of empowerment their top priority is not what they proclaim but the glittering promise of fantastic power and glory.

One is tempted to suggest that a failed revolution is no revolution at all. It is rather a power-grab that, like everybody else, may freely choose to proclaim itself a revolution and insist on being called and hailed as a revolution simply because it can do so. A true revolution, by definition, cannot have failed. A revolution is a flexible constant that manifests itself in an ongoing, never-ending process of positive renewal and growth. A power-grab, on the other hand, is an unfortunate political event that remains unchanged for as long as it lasts. Where a revolution actively looks forward to and creatively seeks to actualize popular political empowerment, a power-grab forbids looking forward and promotes a culture of obnoxious political subjection in order to prolong its stay in power.

A power-grab often assails our senses with the free and ubiquitous rhetoric of revolution. Through a vernacular of offensive and parochial jingoism, it makes lofty pronouncements of revolutionary cause and intent and roundly condemns all the colonizers and neocolonizers that ever existed on earth. At the very moment of its empowerment, the power-grab already thinks of the nation as composed of friends and enemies, so-called patriotic and unpatriotic citizens. This unfortunate bifurcation of the nation-body betrays the power-grab's fractured and utterly disjointed misunderstanding of national mission, national empowerment, and what revolutions are all about. The power-grab prides itself and often loudly brags about the frequency and efficiency with which it severely deals with traitors and enemies of the nation, always the one percent who must never be allowed to destroy the 99 % at State House. Like a large iron tent with great iron walls, the power-grab plants itself firmly upon and over the national space even as it perfects its damaging politics of insults and enmity. The power-grab grows, nurtures and sharpens its sweet tooth for power even before the moment when it actually grabs power. And because all other motivations and justifications for the power-grab are marginal to the power-grab itself, they are manifested only as flamboyant rhetorical devices to be swished and rattled around to deflect attention from embarrassing failures and to justify the power grabber's only real expertise: a politics of insults and enmity.

The power-grab never really captures the essence of political power beyond the physical act of grabbing power and installing itself as a government. True political power is manifested not in a state's monopoly and misguided application of force over its citizens, but in a state's demonstrated willingness and capacity to generate and actualize a culture of popular political enlightenment among its citizens. A state is only truly powerful to the extent that it presides over an empowered nation. It is the crippling powerlessness of the power-grab that explains why it is so obsessed with demonstrating just how powerful it is. The power-grab fears the very idea of an empowered people, and because it is inextricably part of the people, it cannot help but feel as powerless as the people. Rather than seek and discover its proper station and role in the national scheme of things, the power-grab assumes what it feels is the most convenient position at the top of the human pyramid and insists on staying there no matter what. From its illusory citadel of power, the power-grab manufactures enemies left, right and centre and criminalizes looking

forward and the very notion of popular political empowerment. Through a deliberate series of brutally repressive measures, the power-grab forcibly imposes its parochial identity on the nation.

By discouraging a forward-looking politics and criminalizing popular empowerment, the power-grab inadvertently feeds and fuels the real revolution. It galvanizes opposition to itself by provoking questions over the limits of political power and authority, questions over ownership of the nation, and questions over what comes after the inevitable decline and fall of the power-grab. The politics of repression inspires thoughtful engagement with the practical challenges of the nation and a burning desire to actualize a politics of universal mutual respect characterized by universal citizen empowerment. It highlights the need to look forward and nurture a genuine understanding not only of our future practical challenges, but especially of our present political realities. Repression drives home the important lesson that the challenges of the future are really the challenges of the present.

The revolutionary culture that emerges from political repression manifests itself not in the pursuit of numbered visions (e.g. Vision 2020) or of numbered goals (e.g. Millennium Development Goals), but in persistent critical engagement with current socio-economic and political problems which, in turn, inspire a constant search for answers and solutions to such problems. In essence, what most inspires the revolutionary consciousness is how to transcend the ugly and damaging politics of the day and actualize a politics of natural justice, which is only possible in a nation of politically empowered citizens, not only in terms of being able to vote their national servants in and out of office, but especially in terms of being reasonably conversant with their constitutional rights and responsibilities. The revolutionary consciousness eagerly and enthusiastically engages the challenge of empowering the people politically not through moribund civic education commissions, but through concrete and coherent national institutions and processes geared towards actualizing a nation of politically empowered citizens.

Many power-grabs pay lip service to the important task of political empowerment by setting up moribund civic education commissions. Faithful cronies and mis-inspired loyalists of the regime – all without adequate civic education themselves – are hand-picked to chair and sit on such commissions. A solemn inauguration ceremony is held where the unspoken understanding is firmly established and confirmed that only “patriotic” lessons in civic education must be given. The civic education panel makes a few public appearances and falls forever silent which, paradoxically, was the idea all along. As far as the power-grab is concerned, all people need to understand and always keep in mind is that “we are in power because we enjoy the mandate of heaven not of the ancient Chinese kind which could be lost, but of the kind which could only be lost when heaven itself expressly says so to everyone’s hearing and physically intervenes to make it happen.”

Unlike the genuine revolution, the power-grab hates the very idea of political empowerment because it might suggest stepping down and becoming ordinary citizens again – as if it is ever possible for any citizen to be anything but an ordinary citizen. Refusing to imagine the day when it will step down, the power-grab fights anything that tends to suggest the idea of such an unimaginable day. Concepts like

national equality, natural justice, informed voting, freedom of expression, freedom of association, human rights and the rule of law are branded vestiges of colonialism and the obnoxious neocolonial stooges who are identified and neutralized to enhance the longevity of the power-grab. On the other hand, the genuine revolution is inspired and fed by these very concepts. It creatively engages in measured contemplation, looks steadily forward and beyond the period of the power-grab, and thoughtfully plans for the actualization of a better and brighter nation of politically empowered citizens who will never again succumb to a power-grab.

(25 September 2015)

26

Navigating the obstacles

Moments after I shared my article “Looking Beyond the Power-Grab” on one of the Gambian community list serves, a critic hit the reply button and called it “cowardly academic crap”. After contemplating his “cowardly academic crap” for a while, I hit the reply button and sent him an empty response. So unreasonably uncivil was the intervention that another member of the list serve could not help observing that while he respected the critic’s free speech, he was “also free to conclude that his interventions are rude and negative without adding anything of value” and that “incivility without purpose does not serve us well.” There was no further comment on the matter from members of the list serve.

I, of course, did not expect my critic to understand why I responded to his “cowardly academic crap” with an empty email. And I don’t know how he responded to my empty email. He perhaps called it cowardly academic crap as well. Whatever the case may be, the bottom-line is that in the face of our current challenges, and considering that our objective is to nurture a genuinely tolerant socio-political culture in our country, we simply cannot afford to be intolerant of harsh opinion, or to

engage in pointless and potentially acrimonious exchanges. We are not obliged to accept or agree with people's opinions; but we are obliged to respect them persistently, however unreasonable, however mistaken and misgiven we think they are.

Several days later my critic hit again. Reacting to "The Disengaged Public" on the same Gambian community list serve, he kindly proffered a polite compliment followed by a polite demand to know what my "solution to the African problem" was: "So Baba," he wrote, "fine words. What is your solution to the African problem?" His question struck me as odd, not because it was mysterious, but because there was something wrong with it. Again, I hit the reply button and sent him a silent response, an empty email. "It doesn't really matter, to you, does it?" he politely queried in a follow-up intervention. "Keep up the good work! And enjoy your money! LOL!" Again, I sent him an empty response. I respected his right to criticize my writings, but I reserved the right not to engage him in conversation beyond a silent response in the form of an empty email. My resolve to keep writing, to keep speaking out, to stay publicly involved in the search for answers to our pressing national questions remained totally unshaken.

I could have of course politely explained to my good critic that we simply cannot define a thing by what it is not; that we cannot transform the essence of a thing simply by calling it another name; and that regarding his question, there is really no such thing as "the African Problem"; just as there was never no such thing as "the White man's burden" or "the Dark Continent." I could have politely explained (no quarrels here!) that like any other continent, Africa has not one but numerous problems. I suspect everybody knows this. But while I refused to engage him beyond a silent response, I fully respected his right to express his legitimate if unpleasant opinion on my writings and to pose an odd question on what he understood to be "the African problem." Or I could have admitted that even if there was such a thing as "the African problem", it would be utterly presumptuous and mediocre of me to pretend to know what "the solution" to it was. We should be able to say we don't know when we don't know, but not to questions that seek answers to nonexistent phenomena like "the African problem."

I could not blame my critic for calling "Looking Beyond the Power-Grab" cowardly academic crap. He probably looked in vain and could not find anything that looked like his understanding of revolution in a two-page article in which revolution is mentioned 20 big times. And indeed, the revolution that animates my contributions to our national conversation is not a revolution of the violent sort; which is perhaps what my good critic was looking for. It is a mind revolution, a revolution of ideas that at once seeks to deconstruct academically the power-grab and to enlighten and empower the citizens where it matters most. Ours is a cultural revolution embodying the actualization of an enlightened nation; a nation of politically empowered and creative citizens; a nation where citizens are respected and treated like family because they are citizens enjoying equal rights, ownership, and responsibility for their country; a nation in which the state happily assumes its rightful status and role as a disciplined child and a faithful servant of the people. It is a revolution that seeks to actualize a nation in which public opinion may be rejected and criticized, but never disrespected or shouted down, except when it

insists on being the absolute, inviolable truth that must be accepted without question or else!

Actualizing such a nation requires that we not only tolerate unreasonable and unjustified criticism, but that we are able to deal constructively with it. In order to eliminate the ugly politics of insults, enmity and hostile intolerance that desecrates our national ethos, we must deliberately seek and exploit the merit in every instance of criticism and dissent we encounter, justified or unjustified. Since we yearn for and envision a genuinely democratic society, we must arduously cultivate and unfailingly practise the difficult art of civility, for only then can we encourage the creativity and popular expression necessary to build a potential-enhancing civic culture. Remembering that labels don't necessarily define or transform their object helps. For instance, I know that not all readers of "Looking Beyond the Power-Grab" thought it was "cowardly academic crap." I also entertain the possibility that some readers may call it worse than that. And I am perfectly happy with that. We cannot expect everyone to agree with our views, just as we cannot agree with everyone's views. In a parody of the Golden Rule, I would say always do unto others as you would do unto yourself.

Many Africans, especially among African Diaspora communities, avoid publicly expressing their political opinions for any number of reasons. Key among these is the knowledge that they may be criticized for their views, often severely; that people may disagree with them and potentially drag them into pointless, counter-productive and acrimonious exchanges; that they may even be insulted for their pains. These are perfectly legitimate concerns. But they must not prevent us from exercising our right and duty to participate in our national politics, to contribute to our national conversation, to join publicly the search for much needed answers to our biting and most urgent national questions. It is counter-productive to repress our political opinions, to keep our political thoughts and ideas to ourselves if only because some of them may hold important and useful lessons for the nation. We must come out of our political closet and share our thoughts and opinions on matters of common national interest. Good luck to our fellow critics.

Our ultimate challenge is to cultivate, nurture, and personify a genuine spirit and culture of civility by freely expressing our own opinions while respecting every other legitimate opinion. Illegitimate opinion of course – the kind that insists on being the absolute truth that everybody must accept or else – must be staunchly opposed and called out at every possible opportunity because it is inimical to our national well-being. We must insist that injustice is evil; that the nation equally belongs to every citizen; that no loud protestation of personal supremacy can ever nullify our national identity, embodied by all the citizens of the nation. We must insist that no citizen has the right - legal, natural or otherwise - to impose themselves or their opinions over an entire nation, to claim ownership of an entire nation, to act as if the nation were created for them to the exclusion of everyone else, to insist that they have the answers to all our national questions, or to deny their fellow citizens the right to freedom of expression, association, and equal opportunity access to public resources and offices like national radio, TV, and State House. But beyond rejecting imposed opinion and injustice with all our might, we

Defying Dictatorship

must tolerate disagreements and criticisms from our fellow citizens and from other people, however unreasonable, however unjustified, however much we think them motivated by bad faith, or by loyalty to certain selfish and parochial interests of a political nature.

(19 October 2015)

27

A Gambian hypothesis

For once, we feel some level of confidence in hypothesizing that the end is near for Yahya Jammeh. Perhaps he might live a long life. But he might just be at or near the end of his days in power. Recent trends in his increasingly erratic behaviour, his irresponsible and hubris-driven pronouncements, his chest pounding and his increasingly bold insults and assaults against both local individuals and institutions and global institutions points to one possible conclusion: that the fate that befalls every dictator is about to befall Yahya Jammeh. Of course like all hypothesis, the evidence will determine the thesis. However, if history is anything to go by, Yahya Jammeh has probably reached the end of his days in power. We can only say amen to that because Yahya Jammeh has long outlived his usefulness to our country and has wrecked damage on our national conscience and institutions that it will take many years to remedy.

Yahya Jammeh habitually brags that he will be in power for a billion years which, we think, is just his way of saying that he will be in power for as long as he likes because he knows he cannot live even for a hundred years. If he did he would

be so old and senile that we would simply lift him up from the throne and set him in the yard to enjoy some sunshine. This 'billion years' statement projects the tragic hubris of a man who is so power drunk that he claims mastery over fate and human destiny. The blindness of the heart and the mind of which the holy books warn has afflicted Yahya Jammeh and as such, he no longer sees himself or knows himself as we would say in our local Gambian languages. We hear echoes of the Pharaoh of Moses' day or those of Idi Amin Dada, Saddam Hussein and many other tyrants of the human race whose power had rendered mind-blind. You do not know a thing about how long you will stay in power Mr. Jammeh, or when indeed you will no longer be breathing the air of this world. No human being does, unless they are diagnosed with a terminal illness, physical or political. In spite of all our insights into what the future may hold, we are as blind as a blind bat when it comes to knowing what will happen tomorrow, as in tomorrow, the next day after this. Jammeh has become so paranoid that he sees enemies lurking everywhere – even and especially among his own close confidantes and members of his government, including the human robots of his shadow state. And so he lashes indiscriminately out at literally everybody in this world! That looks very much like the sign of a fatal political illness.

The *Peul Futa* (the Fulani of Guinea Conakry from whom I am descended) say that if you violently shake every tree you see, you will one day shake a tree full of hornets. The implication is obvious. Yahya Jammeh has already or will soon shake such a tree, since he has the very unwise and hubris-driven habit of shaking every tree he sees. He foolishly insults everybody he wishes and thinks that he can get away with anything he says or does. From ordinary security officers to government ministers and other civil servants, Yahya Jammeh lashes out with unprovoked invective, calling people names and doling out all mighty threats of death and destruction to anyone who, in his estimation, is not doing what they should be doing according to his standards which, incidentally, are world class low. There is a widely circulating rumour that he even habitually insults the mothers of his cabinet ministers at cabinet meetings. One can only hope that this is just a rumour; but it is not beyond the realm of possibility knowing that we are talking about a half-wit or maniac who happens to be wielding the most power in his country and commands the power of life and death over 1.8 million people.

Yahya Jammeh consistently insults Gambian journalists, human rights advocates and members of alternate parties, all of which groups he considers, for reasons known only to him, as illegitimate and not deserving of constitutional rights and protections. He has called journalists "illegitimate sons [sic] of Africa", among other ugly names, and has declared that members of alternate Gambian parties are donkeys. This is coming from the mouth of a man who habitually invokes the name of Allah who in the Holy Scriptures explicitly forbids such behaviour. He habitually proclaims that neither the ballot nor the bullet can remove him from power. While the bullet issue is anyone's guess, conducting elections while claiming victory before the fact constitutes one of many the disrespectful and outright insulting behaviours towards the Gambian people by Mr. Jammeh. Why does he hold regular elections if he can declare before the polls that he will remain in

power until “20 million 20” in his own words. Beyond the crudity of the obvious contempt for the Gambian constitution he expresses with such a statement, Jammeh’s pronouncements that no other party will rule The Gambia in a million years reveals the extent of his blinding hubris. It is also another way of saying that suppose the majority of Gambians vote against him in an election, he would not hesitate to use force to steal the elections or insist on staying in power. And he will do it if he thinks he will get away with it, which he might not next time around.

Yahya Jammeh, the man who proclaims his Muslim hood at every possible opportunity, also practises blatant tribalism by habitually insulting Gambian Mandinkas. When he insults Mandinkas in general, he of course cannot leave out anyone belonging to The Gambia’s largest ethnic group, whether they support him or not, whether they are respectable elders or not, whether they are women, children or even babies. While he claims to be a unifier of Gambians on one hand, he singles out an entire people for insults and threats for no conceivably good reason. Surely, the Almighty Allah whose name he invokes all the time does not approve of such ungodly behaviour. One of many conclusions we can reach on this issue is that Yahya Jammeh is no Muslim or even a believer in the God in whose name he castigates all who care to listen. A Muslim cannot be so rude as to subject an entire people habitually to a barrage of insults like Yahya Jammeh does for the mere fact that he feels he can.

But Yahya Jammeh’s hubris-driven rudeness knows neither tribe nor age, or social status. As is now common knowledge, religious elders are a common target of his insults and bullying. While some of these men of God perhaps deserve such maltreatment owing to their aiding and abetting of Jammeh’s tyranny, the majority of them are innocent of any wrongdoing. Witness the recent case of the elderly Sheikh Muhideen Hydara, who endured seven months of state bullying in the form of arrests, bogus charges, and repeated court appearances for allegedly disobeying Jammeh’s order to perform the Eid prayers on a particular day. The elderly Sheikh is just the most recent example of Jammeh’s unjust bullying of religious leaders. The cases of Imam Ba Kawsu Fofana and Imam Baba Leigh are also well known. Both these latter two Imams were arrested and subjected to painful and humiliating treatment because they dared to express an opinion on their country’s political affairs. Having totally personalized both the Gambian state and the Gambian nation, Yahya Jammeh sees any comment critical of his words and actions as a personal affront and proceeds to bully those responsible. Well, it is safe to imagine that these men of God also claim friendship with Jammeh’s Almighty Allah and may well be asking Him for justice against their persecutors. There is nothing Jammeh can do about that. Even within the confines of a tight prison cell, a person can ask for God’s intervention either verbally or in their mind. For is not God the all-hearing, all-knowing? Judge Thou with truth, they could pray, for You are the Best of Judges.

Yahya Jammeh’s favourite target for abuse and insults is of course the West and Western countries and institutions. The reason for his obsessive hatred of the West is not far to see: the fact that they criticize his rampant abuse of the rights of his own people and anyone who resides in The Gambia. Jammeh’s favourite

hobby horse is of course long dead colonialism and in this respect, it is amazing just how similar Jammeh's regime is to the worst of the colonial regimes that existed in Africa. Like colonialism, Jammeh's regime is "bula matari" to borrow Crawford Young's memorable phrase: it is based on foundational violence that brooks no opposition and mercilessly crushes its critics. Like colonialism, Jammeh's regime regards itself "as the sole power to judge its laws"; and like colonialism, the supreme right of the Jammeh regime is its assumed right to deny others their rights. And like colonialism, the Jammeh regime considers its "subjects" as mere things of power, to be treated with contempt and impunity at every possible opportunity. The parallels are legion that the Jammeh regime is not at all different from the most brutal colonial regimes in Africa. In fact in some respects, the Jammeh regime is more brutal than many African colonial regimes. But of course being mind-blind and intellectually corrupt, Yahya Jammeh has no way of seeing this blatant and cruel irony of the proverbial pot calling the kettle black. Mind-blindness and intellectual corruption are behind Jammeh's arbitrary decision to pull The Gambia out of the Commonwealth and most recently, to expel the EU representative to The Gambia. Self-destructive hubris keeps him on the verbal assault against Western nations and pure foolery keeps him shouting that he will never allow the West to colonize The Gambia again. His recent threat to deal mercilessly with the European Union and other Western countries demonstrates the extent of his alienation from reality. How tragic that beautiful little Gambia could be saddled with such ugly leadership.

Until recently, Yahya Jammeh only indirectly attacked his fellow African rulers. But since the issue of term limits was raised a few weeks ago, he has turned all African Union and ECOWAS leaders into stooges of the West who he claims are being used in an attempt to recolonize the continent. Here is segment of his rant on the subject a couple of days ago as published in the June 6, 2015 online edition of The Standard newspaper: "Now they [West] are trying to use Ecowas. They said Yahya Jammeh cannot be changed by elections. They want to use their stooges in Ecowas to impose term limit because that is ... a Western agenda. Where were the so-called Western leaders today 20 years ago when I became head of state? Let me warn Ecowas - Gambia is nobody's colony and our development is not dependent on Ecowas that has already failed because it has been hijacked by the West. Even if the whole world introduced term limit, I will not have a term limit and let me see what you can do. Democracy is power to the people and not power to the West. I am a pan-Africanist, but I will not subscribe to any institution that is hijacked by the West and is used against Africa. If it is the AU, I will leave AU; if it is Ecowas, I will leave Ecowas, but I will not be given lectures by any of these institutions on behalf of the West. Tell me about one electric pole here which was installed by the AU (African Union) or Ecowas or by the British or the Americans. We are not fools! Let them mind their own business."

Indeed, indeed Mr. Jammeh. And you, of course, are Gambia in absolute terms. And you, of course, choose to forget your very own words back in July 1994: "We are not here to stay and we will not allow anyone to be in power in this country beyond ten years. In fact, ten years is too long." I guess you will now say that ten

years is too short; even twenty years is too short for you. You will be in power for a billion years, long after you are dead, gone, and remembered only in ancient history class discussions of Africa's worst dictators. Anyway, suffice it to inform you, sir, that your ill-conceived attack on the African Union and ECOWAS marks the end of you in a very real sense. You have now not only lost the respect of the entire big wide world; you have now become the most visible pariah, the laughing stock and the butt of unfunny smutty jokes of all your fellow African heads of state. I guess if they are stooges of the West some of us on this side of the paranoid and self-righteous equation might well be usefully described as stooges of the Rest (funny turbans and beards anyone?), who incidentally, are just as bad if not worse than the West in many crucial respects! The AU and ECOWAS are probably thinking of a forced exit for all those who refuse term limits and insult them with impunity. They are probably thinking that the ECOMOG model would do the job just fine with a slight tweak in its mandate. The Johannesburg meeting is fast coming up and word on the street is that term limits will be on the agenda again!! And many more angry "Western stooges" will be in attendance!! And who knows, the West might perhaps be thinking that a small group of Special Forces might be a good way of colonizing our small part of Africa again as a way of convincing us that no one can be in power for a billion years or refuse to deliver on their term limit promises. In any case, Mr. Jammeh one has a feeling that the end is always near for those who would violently shake every tree they see.

(10 June 2015)

28

The ideal presidency

“Being president is a humbling job,” said Obama as he spoke at the opening of the George W. Bush Library at the Southern Methodist University Campus in Dallas, Texas on Thursday, 25 April 2013. Those words sprung involuntary tears into my eyes. Indeed, I find tears involuntarily springing to my eyes on many occasions when I watch and hear the speeches of American leaders. Perhaps it is the extremely stark contrast I see between these great but humble citizens, and the mediocre and arrogant persons who impose themselves as so-called leaders in our homeland. Perhaps it is the realization that nothing really keeps Africa from being great but the stifling arrogance and chronic aversion to ideas, knowledge, truth and wisdom that our leaders characteristically demonstrate. While being president of the world’s most powerful nation is considered a humbling job, being president of the world’s poorest and weakest nations is considered licence to assume a godlike status that gives the power to bully and kill the people with total impunity.

Of course, neither Obama nor any other American president, dead or alive is any more human than any African president, dead or alive. Americans are no less

susceptible to corruption and the abuse of power than Gambians. Americans and their leaders are endowed with the same brainpower that Gambians possess. They have the same capacity for thought and rational action; the same weaknesses of the human being. Given this fact of the equality of humanity, Gambians and Africans must wonder why their presidents behave like drunken gods with machine guns blazing among their people. Surely it is not because Americans are better human beings than Gambians or that Americans are less likely to be corrupted by power; nor is it because Gambians are less capable of being human or humble than Americans. Humility may be a naturally cultivated characteristic of human beings; but in situations of power, humility is more often than not an imposed virtue. An insultingly arrogant president of the kind we have in The Gambia cannot long survive at the White House.

If there is one thing that every modern American president looks forward to doing, it is establishing a presidential library both to preserve their records in office and, as Bill Clinton put it at the Bush Library opening, in an attempt to rewrite history. History, of course, can both be re-written and not be re-written. It is a joy of historical studies that while there are certain facts that can never be written or interpreted other than what they were, the stuff of history is the art of interpretation and reinterpretation. A hundred historians could write about the same event in different ways and all of them get it right. This is why that part of the Bush library reserved for people to judge and say what they feel should have been done or not done by the Bush administration looks like such a good idea. American presidents care about how history will judge them. Most African presidents, certainly Gambia's Yahya Jammeh just don't give a damn about history or anything other than feeding their sick and bloated egos.

But it is not the fact of historical preservation that primarily drives American presidents to preserve their legacies through the building of presidential libraries. Their motivation derives more from the high premium that the American public, or at least significant sections of it, place on the value of knowledge and education. Americans recognize that ideas are the fuel without which the engine of development cannot start, not to say run smoothly. They recognize that preserving knowledge is preserving energy for the development of future generations. They recognize that their country is great because of its respect for a diversity of ideas and opinions, some right, some wrong, some outright ridiculous. They recognize that perhaps above everything else, they owe the greatness of their nation to the survival of a free marketplace of ideas and the individual's inalienable right to express himself [or herself] freely in any way he [or she] deems necessary. The high premium America places on the value of ideas and free expression is aptly captured in the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States which, among other things, prohibits Congress from making any law abridging the freedom of speech and of expression. Americans know that ideas are the building blocks with which great nations are built, not boots and guns.

Contrast this almost obsessive reverence for the sanctity of knowledge and ideas to the contempt with which knowledge and ideas are held in most African countries and you will get the key to the puzzle of Africa's stagnation. If only African

leaders like Jammeh and their governments had treated ideas with the respect they deserve from the dawn of independence, Africa's story would have been a whole lot different than what it has turned out to be after over half a century of independence. Above everything else, it is the insensitive strangulation of ideas that lies at the roots of Africa's poverty and stagnation. The stupefying mountains of seemingly intractable problems facing African societies today are nothing but the bitter fruits of African leaders' selfish intolerance of differing opinion and their refusal to recognize and privilege the acquisition of knowledge as the most important path to a people's advancement. Witness the closure of Citizen FM and Teranga FM in The Gambia for no other reason than they sought to enlighten the Gambian people by translating the news into the vernacular and encouraging open political discussion.

African leaders like Yahya Jammeh build roads, hospitals and monuments to be displayed as the marks of their achievement; but they neglect building the most precious and powerful resources of their nations: their people's minds. They know that building the people's minds is building the people's power, and therefore giving the people the opportunity to question their actions and boot them out of power if they misbehave. American presidents feel their power as a humbling experience because they feel the power of their people and know that while they occupy the most powerful office in the world, their success and very survival depends on recognizing the extent of the power of their people in general and their colleagues and opponents in Congress and the Judiciary in particular. American presidents cannot just wake up and decree the passage of a law, or have someone arbitrarily arrested and detained, or fire a judge, a secretary of state or a director without as much as a single word of explanation. Being merely human, they might wish to do such things in their personal spaces; but they realize that their power is severely limited by the perpetual presence of the public eye and the people's capacity to punish them. For this reason, their being president represents a humbling experience. This is as it should be everywhere in the world because all people have a right to be treated with dignity if not actually feared by their leaders. That is the ideal presidency that Africans must fight for and win if the continent is to escape the vicious cycle of poverty and stagnation it has suffered since independence.

(30 May 2013)

29

Imagined nations

African governments are fond of violently pouncing upon peaceful protesters and those who express dissenting opinion, sending them to jail and, in some cases, clobbering them to death, as happened with Solo Sandeng. Those who survive violent arrest and/or torture are slapped with heavy charges, often invariably including the ubiquitous “disturbing of the peace” and treason. Peaceful protesters expressing their legitimate public opinion within the limits of their constitutionally guaranteed rights are forcefully criminalized and accused of trying to overthrow their governments by unlawful means. The irony is that because peaceful protesters are acting within their constitutionally guaranteed rights, they cannot possibly be committing treason at the same time.

Yet, in a majority of cases, Africa’s peaceful protesters so arraigned are declared guilty and sentenced, to time, to death, or to indefinite detention and starvation unworthy of human dignity. African courts under the obvious control of intolerant governments routinely find innocent people guilty of nonexistent crimes. Peaceful protests such as the ones held in April 2016 by Gambia’s Solo Sandeng and the

UDP leadership cannot possibly be treasonable felony. The government's treason charges may stick to the case, but not to the persons of the UDP defendants because they are simply not guilty of treason. In the laws of nature, you really cannot make something what it is not simply by calling it so. It is like insisting that a cow is really a chicken and that you heard it coo and can see its feathers too!

African governments that pounce on peaceful protesters are genuinely afraid of what peaceful protests can do: they can overthrow a government, but only lawfully, since the protests are lawful. The Arab spring that toppled Arab dictatorships in North Africa started small, then ballooned to match the size of the government's unpopularity with the people. Protests of such magnitude take a long time coming, a long time of the suppression of small protests and dissenting opinion by the state which creates widespread feelings of anger and disgust in the population. Dictatorships continually undermine themselves because with every small act of tyranny against somebody, the circle of public anger widens, even if only by the relatives and friends of the affected persons. By trying to prevent the growth of protest movements, African governments try to silence the future but end up giving the future a larger, louder, more insistent and more coherent voice.

It seems entirely lost to many African governments that it is within the rights of a people to remove and replace their government through constitutional, and if necessary, unconstitutional means. The critical difference is that while toppling a government by force of arms may be claimed as a "constitutional" right – as Mr. Jammeh and his colleagues did on July 22, 1994 – it is still a treasonable felony. This natural right to violent insurrection by oppressed persons may be treasonable, but it is still a right either explicitly or implicitly resident in the constitution as the right to insurrection against injustice and unbearable oppression by the State. The best antidote to public protest is government tolerance and responsiveness to public opinion, especially public opinion addressing issues of general national interest, such as electoral laws and government policies. The suppression of legitimate political dissent is unfailingly counter-productive for the State and its mother, the Nation.

In an alternative trajectory of recent Gambian history, the Sandeng protest would have attracted police attention. The police would send some officers to help maintain law and order by their presence. Solo would be allowed to have his protest, to lay out his demands, to condemn loudly government policy, ask for electoral reforms immediately and even call upon the government to step down because he believes – rightly or wrongly – that it has lost all political and moral legitimacy to govern. At some point, the protest time would be up and Solo and whatever crowds that may have gathered would disperse with a threat to continue protesting until their demands are met. The government hears about the protest and issues a statement defending its electoral laws, criticizing Sandeng and the UDP, and encouraging a dialogue and public debate on the issue. It organizes a free and fair referendum on the issue with all interested parties freely campaigning for their point of view. If the majority of Gambians say there should be electoral reform, there would be electoral reform. If the majority of Gambians say no electoral reform, well, no electoral reform and the UDP would be morally obliged to

respect the wishes of the majority for the current election cycle while reserving the right to continue advocating electoral reform within the limits of the law.

To crack down and forcefully suppress Sandeng and the UDP leadership for demanding electoral reform is to misunderstand totally the nature of the nation-state. Such action may seem natural in another type of political formation, an absolute monarchy with no constitution aside from the king, for instance. But even there, the natural right to insurrection exists, hence history's many revolutions in which absolute monarchs are forcefully toppled. In all situations, regardless of the nature of the State in power, the nation equally belongs to everybody. It could be said without much fear of error that all Gambians equally love The Gambia. Arrested protesters and journalists are loudly told during police interrogation that they are enemies of the State out to destroy the country. It is implied that there are some Gambians who hate their own country so much that they are plotting to destroy it physically, often with the help of some imaginary malignant foreign interests. One dares to say that a citizen may be deprived of anything but their love of country. Yes, citizens may dislike, even hate their government. But they cannot dislike or hate their country itself because that is contrary to the laws of nature. It is like disliking or hating your own identity, an obvious contradiction in terms possible only under abnormal conditions. For example, no one questions Donald Trump's and Hillary Clinton's love for America. Trump simply wants an America that builds walls to keep Mexicans out and ban Muslims from entering the country, while Clinton wants another kind of America. In the recent Brexit saga, some British citizens wanted a UK that was part of the European Union, others wanted a UK that was not part of the European Union. Neither party could be legitimately accused of hating their country. They are merely arguing for their preferred version of the nation, their imagined nation (to evoke Benedict Anderson's useful concept of the nation as an imagined community).

Because of the grotesque dislocation of the African State from its natural space as an integral and subservient segment of the population, it is incapable of developing an appropriate understanding of its locus, status, role and function in society. The African State conceives of itself and acts as if it is a separate, all-powerful entity, located high above the people, with total command of the police, the army, the courts, the prisons and all the laws of the land. It insists on knowing best what is good for the country and reserves the right to protect itself violently against any constitutional right that interferes with its absolute power. In a strange case of political dystopia, the State arrogates to itself total ownership of the country, the people and their future, and leaves no room for alternative viewpoints on the national project.

This profoundly tragic distortion of the nation's character makes it impossible for the State to appreciate that political conflict in general, and political dissent and opposition in particular are inevitable expressions of citizens' desire as to what their country should be, or should be like. The Gambia government has its own idea of what Gambia should be. The UDP and other Gambian individuals, political organizations, the media, the Church, the Mosque – all have their ideas of what Gambia should be. Some of their visions or aspects of their visions of an imagined

Gambian nation may be similar, some may be different. In all cases, the State that enjoys an advantage of political power should remain embedded and subservient to the people at all times. What vision of an imagined Gambia takes ascendancy in the nation's politics should be determined not by police boots, batons, guns and extrajudicial incarcerations and executions, but by the people, if necessary through their own vocal agency, or their elected representatives or competent courts of the land. If it is understood that no citizen really hates their country and that political differences are simply expressions of different imagined nations, and are to be expected and even encouraged, the kind of destructive politics we have seen in Africa since independence may begin to shift in the right direction.

(28 June 2016)

30

Open Letter to President Jammeh: On granting amnesty to the Gambian Diaspora

Dear Mr. President,

I am writing this open letter to you in direct response to your speech of 22 July 2015 granting amnesty to several categories of people, including those convicted of treason in The Gambia and those members of the Gambian Diaspora who have been in disagreement and/or outright conflict with you and your government. This letter is motivated by pure love of country and a desire to encourage what I understand, rightly or wrongly, to be a potential beginning of change for the better for our dear Motherland. My uncompromising hatred for all forms of injustice is only equal to my belief in the human capacity to evolve and improve. In granting forgiveness, I understand from your speech that you desire to be forgiven for crimes committed under your watch, if not by the victims of these crimes, then by God.

Some members of the Gambian Diaspora community who have been in disagreement and/or conflict with you and your government are not liars as you char-

acterized them; nor have they ever committed a single crime in their lives. Their only “crime” has been to criticize you and your government for doing things they believe to be detrimental to the well-being of our country, and to offer advice on how best to move our country in the best direction. They have simply been criminalized by the spirit of intolerance that characterized your regime and which, I dearly hope, is about to become a thing of the past. Of course, no one can claim to be infallible and we have staunchly resisted and rejected your claims of infallibility in the past. And should you claim to be infallible in the present or the future, some of us will reject it out of hand; for infallibility may only be claimed by the Almighty God to whom you make frequent reference. If you do indeed read the Quran everyday as you mentioned in your speech, then this fact is not lost upon you. Human beings are fallible creatures and peace will elude them as long as they refuse to acknowledge that fact and act accordingly. Perhaps your frequent reading of the Quran (in translation I hope) is beginning to bear fruit. Perhaps you are growing increasingly capable of recognizing the error of your ways and making amends to that effect. That can only bode well for our dear Motherland.

I hope you understand, Mr. President, that saying you forgive your critics and opponents in the Diaspora does not mean that they will not criticize you where they find this necessary, or desist from advocating the kinds of political changes that they feel is best for our Dear Motherland. Indeed, our freedom of expression and association is absolutely non-negotiable and inviolable by any leader or government on earth. We reserve the right to condemn unjust laws and object to the abuse of our God-given rights by the state which is our child and servant, or the head of state who is our child and chief servant. We conceive of the nation as one big family – the Family Nation – in which the people are the parents and the government, the children. The head of state deserves due respect as the First Child of the Family Nation. But he/she will be censored if he/she disrespects or in any way unjustly abuses public authority, the dignity of any member of the national family or our national institutions. So will all members of their government. Disagreements are inevitable in any social unit; but disagreements within the Family Nation should never be elevated to the status of enmity; they must be tolerated and resolved where possible. Where it is not possible to resolve amicably and/or legally disagreements within the Family Nation, family members must be content with agreeing to disagree. No member of the family should be forcibly silenced or punished because they disagree with other members of the family. All members aspire to help our Dear Motherland become a universal model of all the beautiful virtues expressed in the Holy Scriptures – from forgiveness, which you just practised – to justice, respect for human dignity, freedom of worship, and unconditional tolerance of differing opinion within the nation-state space, among others. The task of helping our Motherland become such a model is a perpetual work in progress that we will carry out as long as is humanly possible and that future generations of Gambians will continue after us. And the fact that the nation is a work in progress means that we and those who come after us bear the responsibility of pointing out faults within our leadership and our political and cultural institutions and seeking remedies for them. In effect, what I am saying is that if you do some-

thing we feel is not good for our nation, we will criticize you for it and we will say what we believe, rightly or wrongly, is the best thing for our nation. No Gambian may claim to love The Gambia more than any other Gambian, and it is important for those handling the affairs of our nation to be perpetually and immediately cognizant and respectful of this fact. So while I personally appreciate the fact that you have released political prisoners and other people convicted of various offences in The Gambia, and the fact that you have decriminalized those innocent critics of you and your government residing outside our beloved country, I believe that there is still much more you can and should do in your own personal interest and in the interest of our Dear Motherland. Below is a very short list of suggestions:

Institute Term Limits: This is one of the most important steps you should take in the interest of our nation. Moreover, it is a step that you strongly promised Gambians that you would take 21 years ago when you took over the reins of our national government. I am sure you clearly remember saying that even ten years is too much for any single person to be in power in The Gambia. Instituting term limits is not, as you recently suggested, an act of pandering to the West, or being a puppet of the West. It is an act that will heal our nation in ways that we can only imagine at this time. Giving ownership of democracy, human rights, term limits or any other aspect of political civility to the West is giving the West power it does not possess or agency it may never lay claim to. Civility is a human virtue, not a Western imposition because the West has no power or authority to impose it. Instituting term limits is simply the right thing to do and I hope you will do it in your own personal interest and in the best interest of our dear nation. Occasional changes of political leadership propel a nation forward; it allows for experimentation with different ideas as to how best to improve the conditions of a nation. On the other hand, overstaying in power may give the illusion of progress but is actually a recipe for political, cultural and developmental stagnation, if not outright national disaster. The fact that Jawara overstayed in power was among your primary excuses for toppling him. Do not repeat his fatal political mistake.

Annul the 2015 Elections Amendment Law: As a leader who seized power in the name of bringing about political freedom and equality, you have many times abrogated that declared intention. However, with the incredible increase in electoral fees that your government is in danger of imposing, you have literally gone way over the top and reached perhaps the farthest point away (so far) from your initial declared intention of bringing about political freedom and equality. The best thing to do in the interest of our Dear Motherland is simply nip this unjust idea in the bud and leave the fees as they are. It is manifestly unjust to make it virtually impossible for well-meaning Gambians to offer their services to the nation through elected office simply because they are not as wealthy as yourself and cannot afford the fees. Let the Gambian people choose their leaders in free and fair elections, which are already hard enough to conduct within the context of our current political culture.

Consider Alternative Views: Ideas, Mr. President, are the building blocks of a nation. Therefore, it is incumbent upon you as Head of State to seriously consider all ideas proposed in the name of helping our Dear Motherland, regardless of their origin. The Gambian media needs to be free to agree or disagree with you and

your government, because they are equally invested in the welfare of our nation. The criminalization of legitimate public opinion is much like cutting your nose to spite your face and represents a violation of the fundamental God-given rights of citizenship every Gambian should enjoy without let or hindrance. Where media or journalists explicitly break the law or commit sedition or libel, let the rule of law take its due course rather than have state agents unlawfully pounce upon them. The practice of punishing journalists and media houses simply because they criticize their own government is utterly counter-productive. Just as parents have the right to criticize and correct their children, so do journalists have the right to criticize and correct their government, whose members are their children and servants.

I understand that our alternative political parties are suggesting a list of electoral reforms for your consideration. It would perhaps be unrealistic to say that you must accept all their suggestions, which may in fact be the best thing for you to do. However, I would urge you to consider seriously some of their proposals if not in recognition of their merit and legitimacy as coming from well-meaning, well-respected Gambian citizens, then in the interest of what is best for our Dear Motherland. Our electoral politics are in much need of improvement and I am sure the proposals coming from our other political leaders have something to offer. You will notice that I do not refer to them as opposition parties because I think the term “opposition” does not adequately capture the essence of our alternative political parties and leaders. We need a rethinking of not only our political culture, but the political nomenclature that belongs to this increasingly outmoded culture, including terms like opposition, honourable, and excellency.

Finally, Mr. President, I heard you say that you have turned a new page. I dearly hope you have. Let me just say that turning a new page is much more than offering amnesty to convicted criminals and allowing Gambians in the Diaspora the freedom to visit their homeland without fear of arrest or persecution. That is certainly a significant step, but it is only one step – however significant – that you need to take towards bettering the condition of our Dear Motherland. I have outlined a few other crucial steps you need to take in this short open letter. If you have already decided to take these steps, praise be to God. If not, I urge you to consider seriously taking them sooner rather than later, in the best interests of our Dear Motherland. All Power Belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds.

(23 July 2015)

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Why Jammeh jippo

In a recent piece published on *Kairo News*, Karamba Touray tells the sad story of Imam Chernó Gassama. He writes: “I have not been able to take this good man out of my mind from Friday July 1st when a friend of mine visited his family and reported a distressed and sad situation. He is Chernó Gassama, imam of the village of Dasilameh in Upper Fulladu District, The Gambia. He was picked from his home on November 2nd 2015 by officers of the National Intelligence Agency, taken to the Brikamaba Police Station for a brief moment before being taken to Janjanbureh prisons where he has been held for the last 8 months. Throughout this period he has not been told why he was arrested, he has not been charged with any offence, he has not been allowed any family visit, he has not been allowed any legal representation and he has not been given medical attention. . . . his large family are left to wonder the fate of their patriarch and having to contend with the emotional stress of not knowing why their own government would set upon a completely innocent religious leader and insist on imprisoning him for no earthly reason, and refuse to even allow them to set eyes on him.”

The catalogue of injustices inflicted upon Imam Gassama and his family are

painfully palpable in Karamba's piece. One cannot help a feeling of justified outrage that human beings can treat other human beings in such cruel fashion. No, this is not a case of political expediency. It is a case that challenges Gambians to confront the human condition as it is in their nation with a view to removing its evils and enhancing its virtues. A culture that tramples upon human dignity is a debased culture. And respect for human dignity must be the yardstick by which all political activity is measured. Assuming that all Gambians at least claim to love themselves and their country, attempts must be made to make all Gambians realize their responsibility for the health of our national culture. The responsibility to construct a healthy national culture is a shared universal within the nation; it must be borne and executed by all citizens, especially by the nation's first citizen, the Head of State.

Of course, as far as Imam Gassama's family is concerned, there could possibly be "no earthly reason" for his arbitrary arrest and extra judicial imprisonment for eight months. But there has to be a reason, and that reason has to be a "reason of state", especially since his arrest and detention were effected by state security agents and he is detained at a state detention facility. Since the action of the state in Imam Gassama's case is clearly detrimental to the health of our nation, it must be criticized and it should be rescinded. And since, as usual, no reason has been given for the state's action, Gambians are left with the option of guessing what might have prompted Imam Gassama's arbitrary arrest and extrajudicial detention. Perhaps Imam Gassama delivered a sermon in which he called some state words or actions UnIslamic? We know that both Imam Baba Leigh and Imam Ba Kawsu Fofana were arbitrarily arrested and incarcerated for long periods for precisely this reason. There is no law in the Gambian books that makes it a crime to criticize the head of state, or express an opinion on a matter of public interest. Why then does the Jammeh government so harshly punish Gambians for doing these things? If Imam Gassama was arrested for criticizing Jammeh or his government or agents in a sermon, natural justice and common sense demand that he be released immediately and amends be made to him and his family.

Or perhaps it was because one of Jammeh's marabouts or oracles told him that Imam Gassama represents some sort of undefined threat to his state? Or perhaps a marabout or oracle had warned that Imam Gassama must be arrested to prevent him from praying for Jammeh's successor. Whatever the case, we know that there has to be a "reason of state" for Imam Gassama's extrajudicial arrest and incarceration. Needless to say, that "reason" cannot stand the truth of reason or judicial scrutiny, which is why the State uses its shadow instruments of coercion to by-pass the legal process. It is precisely because this reason cannot stand the test of rational scrutiny that Imam Gassama's family is not allowed to see him. If they did, the Imam would tell them what he was told is why he was arrested.

We can argue with certainty that after his arbitrary arrest on 5 November 2015, Imam Gassama must have been interrogated by the NIA at the Brikamaba Police Station where, Karamba tells us, "he was taken for a brief moment before being taken to Janjanbureh prisons where he has been held for the last 8 months." During this interrogation, they must have given him "a reason" for his arrest. He was

probably asked what party he supported or whether he supported President Jammeh. He was most likely accused of being an enemy of the country, out to sabotage the good work HE [His Excellency] is doing for the people of this country? An attempt must have been made to make the Imam feel guilty of not being a good person because he was opposed to God's choice as ruler of Gambia. But, of course, Imam Gassama could not possibly feel guilty about a crime Allah knows he did not commit. We are almost certain that Imam Gassama totally believes that his ordeal is only possible because Allah permits it and that if it is Allah's will, he will be released and go back to his family, his community and his congregation. Men of God consider their ordeals pilgrimages upon which they are destined to embark by the only power they bow and submit to, the power of God, beside whom state power is literally nothing. No wonder that, as Karamba tells us, "The imam as a strong man of faith has endured with patience and elevated emaan . . . (trust in God's omnipotence)"

Or perhaps Imam Gassama's arbitrary incarceration is a case of preventive detention without a Preventive Detention Act under which people are detained "for crimes yet to be committed" as Dr J. B. Danquah puts it in one of his petitions to Nkrumah from Nsawam prisons. Their written grounds for detention, in Ghana's case, invariably concluded with the clause, "Your detention is necessary in order to prevent you from acting in future in a manner prejudicial to the security of the State." When Karamba writes of Imam Gassama that eight months after his detention "he has not been charged with any offence . . . he has not been allowed any legal representation and he has not been given medical attention" he may well have been writing of Dr Danquah who twice languished under preventive detention, from October 3, 1961 to June 20, 1962 (nine months) when he was released, and from January 8, 1964 to the morning of February 4, 1965 (one year) when, from a standing position, he literally dropped dead from heart failure in his cell at Nsawam prisons. He was 69.

Perhaps Jammeh was told by a marabout or oracle that Imam Gassama must be placed under preventive detention, that is, arrested and detained to prevent him from praying for Jammeh's successor? It is not outside the realm of possibility. The landscapes of History and Scripture are littered with examples of rulers trying to prevent a prophecy of succession by killing people, detaining them, or having them banished from the land. All these examples share the same final outcome – they fail, a lesson that one cannot escape their fate, whatever they do. Those who believe in the religious dimensions of human destiny will argue that considering God's omnipresence, God's will is the only thing any marabout or oracle can possibly see. Since the marabout or oracle cannot possibly exist outside of God's presence, anything they see happening must happen within God's presence because there is simply no outside to it. Perhaps it is God's will that Imam Cherno Gassama will only pray for Jammeh's successor on a jail floor? Perhaps the feared successor in the prophecy is currently at Janjangbureh prisons with Imam Gassama? Perhaps in trying to avert the inevitable Jammeh has inadvertently taken the Imam to the intended recipient of his "dangerous" prayers, currently held at Janjangbureh? Certainly, prison walls cannot prevent blessings from reaching any space or object

in the divine presence, and so detaining Imam Gassama for such a reason is an exercise in harmful futility.

Gambians must be forgiven for the tendency to search for reasons of state action in the occult or supernatural realm. This is a direct consequence of our knowledge that Jammeh is a great public admirer of the “occult” and the “supernatural”. He makes no secret of his “prowess” in the realm of the occult and unfailingly holds a holy book and prayer beads in his hands (also a sword, just in case someone tries something funny around him). One is amazed at the facility with which he embodies the personas of both fetish sorcerer and sheikh of Islam at the same time. This is not necessarily bad, since we must maintain our African identities even as we embrace and practise our Islam, Christianity or Judaism. But while fetish sorcery may approve of unjust treatment of the kind inflicted upon Imam Gassama and his family, Islam does not. One is not a Muslim if one’s treatment of fellow human beings, whoever they are, is contrary to the Right Spirit of Islam. Islam, the religion Jammeh publicly claims as his own, does not permit that people are arbitrarily arrested and locked up for eight months, without charges and without trial, without medical attention, and prevented from seeing their families. This practice is foreign to natural law and repugnant to human civilization. Needless to say, it is inimical to the good health of our national culture and must be discarded.

One of the most baffling aspects of many dictatorships is that they do not need to be dictatorships at all; at least not dictatorships of the “developmental” kind we have in Jammeh’s Gambia. Considering his history of holding a comfortable and compliant majority in parliament, Jammeh does not need to revert to extra juridical practices in dealing with opponents, real or imagined, in order to assert his authority or to stay in power. He can easily draw a leaf from Jawara’s book. For thirty years, Jawara held on to power, not through the use of arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial detentions, but through a shrewd use of his comfortable majority in parliament and his immense strategic advantage as head of state.

One very well remembers the vibrancy of Gambian politics before July 1994. At the local markets, people freely and pleasantly argued over which the best party was. PPP and NCP supporters in particular could be heard loudly joking about how much better their parties and leaders were. Of course, we know that violent clashes occasionally broke out between PPP and NCP supporters especially in Baddibu; but these were handled professionally by the police and the courts. Jawara was often harshly criticized at mass rallies by leaders of the opposition and their supporters. Needless to say, he hit back with equal verbal vehemence but never with any kind of noticeable rage or extrajudicial pronouncement. He openly referred to certain Gambians as communists and made it sound as if the opposition did not have either the brains or the means to govern Gambia. Amid all the activity, he popularized in Gambian politics the notion that “*Nii mang kukeh kutela*” (roughly, Mandinka for “you have nothing to fear if you don’t commit a crime”). Gambians did not risk arrest, arbitrary detention or torture for criticizing Jawara and his government, or for expressing their political opinions at the market, Penchu (meeting place), *Bantaba* (meeting place) or anywhere at all. An election cycle or two before he was removed from power, Assan Musa Camara coined a memorable

and widely popular phrase asking Jawara to step down. Jawara Jippo (Jawara step down) almost became a folk song in Gambia and opposition supporters in both villages and towns could often be heard loudly but good-naturedly repeating the mantra to much laughter. Now it is time to sing Jammeh Jippo!

Jammeh Jippo because after 22 years in power, Jippo is the right and just thing for you to do. Jammeh Jippo because back in July 1994 when you seized power you repeatedly assured Gambians that “we are not here to stay”. You assured Gambians that your military council, the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC) was merely out to rectify a bad culture of corruption and “flamboyant lifestyles” and would soon return to the barracks. Jammeh Jippo because you are on record declaring that one of your primary reasons for toppling Jawara was that he had overstayed in power. Jammeh Jippo because you are on record saying that “We will never allow anyone to stay in power beyond ten years. In fact, ten years is too much.” Jammeh Jippo because staying in power beyond ten years is just as bad today as it was before 22 July 1994. It is Jammeh Jippo because Gambians have a natural right to experiment with new leadership, a new leader, whether from your own party or outside of your party. So Jammeh Jippo.

Of course, one can understand why Jammeh Jippo is not an attractive idea at Kanilai Farms. Among other things, it is difficult to imagine oneself going from being the wealthiest and most powerful person in the land, to an ordinary citizen arraigned before a court of law on charges of corruption or human rights violations. But there are instances in African and world history where heads of state are “persuaded” to Jippo and live peaceful lives in their countries or abroad for the sake of national well-being. A good example is Ghana’s Jerry Rawlings. Both his AFRC and PNDC regimes committed gross human rights violations against Ghanaians, including most notably the abduction and murder of three prominent Ghanaian judges. But Rawlings embraced the inevitable Jippo and today, he lives peacefully in Ghana as a respected and very influential elder statesman. So Jammeh Jippo!

(8 July 2016)

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No Mokati Mansa

Actualizing the family nation requires that we reassess the nature of political relationships in our country with a view to relocating political power from the state to the people where it rightfully belongs. And since our present government sees itself as a nation builder perched on top of the social pyramid and wielding all power, we need to revisit the idea of nation building itself with a view to exposing its contradictions and replacing it with the idea of state building. We may begin by asking why is it that while “nation building” is part and parcel of independent Africa’s political vocabulary, we never hear it in France, Britain, Portugal, Germany, and Belgium from where it originated and which had the lion’s share of colonies in Africa?

The simple answer to this question is that nation building is what colonialism claimed to be doing in Africa; it is not what European governments were doing then or will ever think of doing in their own countries. And it is certainly not what independent African governments should be claiming to do in our countries. Within European imperial culture, the concept and practice of nation building betrayed Empire’s assumption that colonized peoples were utterly different and therefore inferior to the colonizers. This assumption was visible in the idea of the

“civilizing mission” or “the white man’s burden” in which the Europeans claimed they were colonizing others in order to deliver them from the darkness of their indigenous cultures into the light of western civilization. France picked and chose those colonized peoples she considered worthy of being accepted into a superior French culture through her famous policy of assimilation. In Portuguese Africa, one was assimilated only after many years of self-acculturation through education, dress, speech and table manners, among other things. Britain, on the other hand, decided that Africans were best civilized and “developed” under the “subject leadership” of their own traditional and neo-traditional rulers (warrant chiefs) through their so-called indirect rule. European cultures were considered superior spaces for which only a select few may aspire and for which all colonized peoples needed to be grateful. Colonized cultures were debased and dismissed out of hand as the ways of a savage and backward people. Those who would not readily accept the dominant ideologies of imperial politics and religion were either written off as irredeemable children of the devil or forcefully pacified. This element of coercive pacification is inherent in the concept of nation building, which suggests an all-powerful or totalitarian state claiming to know what is best for the nation and forcefully prescribing development projects for the nation, whether the people like it or not. Under a politics of nation building, especially as practised by what we have called the Prezidom, the nation itself is hardly ever allowed to contribute anything of substance to its own political evolution and welfare. That right is exclusively reserved and monopolized by the all-powerful, all-knowing Prezidom.

It is interesting to note that during the colonial period when European colonizers were nation building in Africa, the practice had long gone extinct in European societies. The idea of nation building, of an all-powerful government perched on top of the social pyramid, whip in hand and presuming to build the nation below from those heights was unthinkable in late 19th and early 20th century Europe. Western society had long recognized, accepted or been forced to accept that it is nations (people) that build states (governments), not the other way round. The concept of nation building itself was passé in Europe, but it remained a friendly ghost of long dead medieval cultures that could conveniently be resurrected and visited upon colonized peoples. It was a curious practice of imperial power to use laws and other draconian instruments of rule on colonized peoples that they dared not even imagine in their own societies. Long dead censorship laws and emergency measures were resurrected from the dusty cemeteries of European political culture and imposed upon colonized peoples. And since imperial power saw no contradiction in nation building in colonized societies, they simply passed their ghost political culture on to our “independent” African leaders, for whom it is now a favourite hobby horse because it offers ample justification for authoritarianism. In the name of nation building, one-party states are declared, life presidencies proclaimed, military coups staged, and self-defeating “dictatorships for development” imposed. If the people don’t like it they can go to hell.

It is a tragic fact of African history that the three or so generations of independent African leaders have either failed or refused to see that there is something inherently wrong with nation building. Today, the fully formed Prezidom continues

to insist on building the nation by force, whether the people like it or not. It refuses to acknowledge that this is exactly what the colonial state did too. Much like today's African citizens, colonial subjects were expected to be grateful and bow to His Imperial Majesty's Government for bringing them development whether they liked it or not. The only difference between our imperial majesty of the colonial days and our present imperial majesty is that the colonial governor is now an all-knowing, all-powerful African who has no imperial throne or empowered citizens to fear and could therefore do anything and everything he likes with the lives and resources of the people; and if they don't like it they can go to hell. Rather than move away from the harsh and brass character of Bula Matari, the breaker of rocks, as Crawford Young calls the colonial state, African leaders gladly embraced and practised it through a variety of oppressive regimes often worse than Bula Matari's. The culture of dissent that fueled African nationalism, that was tolerated by the colonial state and that brought independence to Africans is now criminalized. Unlike the dreadful Bula Matari, the independent African Prezidom brooks no opposition to its power. Political opponents and critics of the leader are pounced upon, roughed up, killed or sent to prison on specious charges, through a coterie of sinister shadow state institutions – political thugs, nitadi “intelligence” agencies, and mercenary judges, magistrates and prosecutors for whom what matters is not the rule of law, truth or justice, but the word and the pleasure of the president, the likes of our famous Mokati Mansa, the breaker of persons. Clearly, a leadership that specializes in the breaking of human beings cannot claim to be building a nation because human beings are the very foundation of human progress.

It is a strange paradox that the African Prezidom practises a politics of hostility and insults that the oppressive colonial state would have been ashamed to practise. Post-colonial African states of the Mokati Mansa sort thrive on a politics of divide-and-rule more sinister than Bula Matari's: it polarizes and breaks societies and communities into distinct and potentially hostile political factions – with those supporting the ruling party enjoying freedom from oppression, and those supporting other parties being constantly criminalized and persecuted. No matter what they do, supporters of the government (the blue boys?) are portrayed as faultless angels even if they beat people to death or burn somebody's property down. Non-supporters of the government, meanwhile, are called donkeys, denied their agency and rights, and often violently struck down. Individual lives are broken and families shattered in the name of a national security that literally renders the nation increasingly insecure. It is as if Mokati Mansa wishes to freeze time, to keep things the way they are for a million years. No, Mokati Mansa: change is the law of nature, and change will happen, whether you like it or not. Trying to prevent change from happening is like trying to run away from tomorrow. So hard luck, sir!

Gambians deserve a politics of national unity, not a politics of divisiveness and mutual hostility. Gambians deserve a politics of kindness and friendship, not a politics of cruelty and enmity. Gambians say no to the politics of Mokati Mansa and yes to a politics in which every one considers everyone else and treats everyone else like relatives in the same extended family. In such a society, the president and entire leadership of the country will see themselves merely as trustworthy

children chosen by the majority of the people to oversee the proper and orderly conduct of family affairs.

Of course, Mokati Mansa cannot oversee the transformation of our country into a family-nation. That will require a leadership that will be eager to teach but also eager to learn and to drink of the public wisdom; a leadership that will not behave like the infallible and hostile lord and master of the people, perched on top of the social pyramid and forcing dry chunks of “development” down our throats, whether we like it or not. The kind of intellectual and moral energy needed to actualize the family nation can only be generated in an environment of healthy civility and mutual respect between government and people, and among all members of society, regardless of status or political and religious affiliation. Certainly, because all human beings love to be treated with respect, Gambians will not be averse to the idea of universal mutual respect. They will especially cherish the honour of being treated like respected parents and relatives wherever they go, especially at police and military check points where they are currently treated like the helpless subjects of an alien despotism. And they will certainly cherish the privilege of treating government officials of all ranks – from the president to the court clerk – as their loving children and siblings. All this, of course, is conceivable only in an environment in which the rule of law is judiciously observed and enforced. The state as the child of the nation does not mean that the laws of the land will be left unenforced. It merely means that there will be no unjust laws or Mokati Mansa, only just laws that will be fully respected and obeyed by everyone, especially the president.

Abolishing the politics of Mokati Mansa and bringing about the kind of positive fundamental transformation we need in our country will take more than a mere change of individual political leaders or governments. It demands a fundamental transformation of our national mindset itself - our political culture, a formidable but surmountable challenge for the nation school. The type of positive and sustainable political transformation we need requires a homegrown, cohesive, and workable political philosophy whose tenets and principles will readily be understood by all citizens. We believe that a philosophy of the family nation, of the nation as one big family can work well in The Gambia. Alongside an ongoing no to the politics of Mokati Mansa, there should be conscious and well-coordinated efforts at transposing traditional Gambian family values onto our political institutions and practices. If government officials and civil servants understand themselves to be and are seen by the people as the disciplined children of a family nation, they will be constrained to do things that will have adverse effects on the country. We can transform our nation into one big family to which every citizen belongs, not through nation building of the Mokati Mansa sort, but through an evolving process of enlightenment and empowerment that will bring out the best of our collective consciousness and make the politics of civility the cornerstone of our political culture and our national life. We can start by saying no to Mokati Mansa now and no to any Mokati Mansa tendencies whenever they try to rear their ugly heads in our Family Nation.

(26 July 2016)

33

God is not to blame

Some talking points for our alternative leadership

It seems to me that one of the main reasons alternative parties fail to win elections in Africa is that they do not adequately connect with the ordinary voter. This is by no means an absolute generalizable, not a theory of electoral failure by alternative parties. It is simply to say that there might be ways to better connect with the ordinary voter which could be instrumental in showing them the true state of their political situation and therefore help muster more support and hopefully an electoral victory over entrenched regimes. This short piece is designed to highlight a few of the issues that alternative parties and leaders need to communicate to the ordinary voters. There are certain things that might be obvious to those active in day-to-day politics but might not be so obvious to the mass of African voters. Teasing out these issues and actively and aggressively addressing them could be very helpful in winning elections.

One tricky issue that alternative leaders and parties need to communicate to

ordinary voters is the fact that kings (mansa) and kingdoms (mansa kunda) do not really exist within the framework of a constitutional environment unless, of course, they are constitutional monarchies. The perception that African presidents are mansa is a damaging obstacle in the way of Africa's political transformation because a lot of people take it literally and associate it with a number of outdated conceptions of government that carry a lot of unproductive and stifling baggage. Key among these negative connotations is the entrenched perception in African cultures that opposing a sitting president is tantamount to opposing the will of God, who put the president in power. The fact that African political culture has remained largely unchanged from the precolonial through the colonial to the post-colonial period in Africa is as unfortunate as it is damaging to our aspirations for political advancement. Our alternative leaders must carefully think about this issue and frame it in terms that would convince people of the validity of their arguments while at the same time avoid the tricky possibility of challenging their belief in the idea that leaders are appointed by God. Of course, on the surface, and in a profoundly religious environment such as ours, suggesting that someone could become president without God's will is a dangerous and potentially self-defeating endeavour. Nevertheless, the case must be made to the African voters that in a constitutional republic, presidents are not the same as mansas. The differences between precolonial kingdoms and constitutional republics need to be highlighted as precisely and meticulously as possible.

Where it is considered too difficult to address the issue of constitutional republic versus precolonial monarchy, our alternative leadership must nevertheless find a way of convincing the ordinary voter that being "mansa" does not mean literally owning the country. The reality that the country equally belongs to all citizens must be explained in clear and unambiguous terms. At the same time, it must be explained to the voters that being "mansa" does not give anyone the right to oppress their people with impunity. Verses from the Quran and the Bible need to be invoked in support of the idea that God hates oppression and injustice. Where necessary, religious leaders and scholars should be invited to address this particular issue and demonstrate how there is a lot of specific evidence in our holy books that support the thesis that leaders should not be oppressors of their people. Since entrenched regimes openly manipulate religion to maintain unjustly their grip on power, there is nothing wrong with our alternative leaders calling upon religious leaders and scholars to debunk the myth of divine kingship in a constitutional republic. It should also be made clear that before the Europeans came to Africa, African mansas who oppressed their people were removed from power by the people. Because elections as we know them did not exist at the time, force was often used to effect a change of leadership. Now that elections are here, the people should be encouraged to exercise their power to remove their oppressive "mansa" through the ballot box.

A second message that needs to be tirelessly communicated to the people by our alternative leadership is best communicated in the form of a question: Why do we not hear of military coups and attempted coups in America, Britain, Italy and Germany? The choice of these particular countries is deliberate, informed by the

fact that most Africans are more familiar with these countries than with most other Western countries. Having posed this question, our alternative leadership should then proceed to give as many good answers as possible. One that readily comes to mind is that in these countries, no single person can claim ownership of their country or cling indefinitely on to power. Specific examples should be given. For instance, since 1994 when Gambia's Yahya Jammeh became president, America has had three presidents: Bill Clinton was president for eight years; George W. Bush was president for eight years; Barack Obama has been president for eight years. And America will have another president in 2017. Why should Yahya Jammeh insist on being president for 22 years as if he personally owns Gambia, and even though Gambia is a constitutional republic, just like America? Another example is Britain: Since Yahya Jammeh became president in 1994, Britain has had six leaders: Margaret Thatcher, John Major, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, David Cameron and now Theresa May. The point must strongly be communicated to the people that having regular changes of political leadership is one of the main reasons why the military in these countries do not seek to overthrow a sitting leader. It also means that no single leader can claim ownership of their country and represents an example of how people exercise their power to change their leaders on a regular basis. Closely tied to this reality is the constitutional doctrine or concept of the rule of law, which must also be carefully explained to our voters: namely that in a constitutional republic, no one is above the law and no one can break the law with impunity, even the president. Because the rule of law is respected in these countries, leaders cannot insist on staying in power beyond a certain period defined by law.

Closely tied to why we do not hear of military coups in America, Britain, Italy and Germany is the broader question of why Africans are stuck in poverty and are always running to the West for economic salvation. Certainly, there are many complicated answers to this question. It is certainly not because Africans are less intelligent than Americans or Europeans. The extremely damaging myth that must be addressed is the notion that somehow, God made this world for white people and that Africans must be content to wait for the afterlife. This is also a tricky issue because it is so deeply ingrained in the consciousness of our people. Nevertheless, our alternative leadership must address this issue head on and remind voters that all human beings are descended from Adam and Eve and possess the same capacity for intelligence, growth and advancement. The key solution to Africa's perennial economic stagnation in the face of the continent's vast material resources must be directly linked to the fact that African leaders stifle the intellectual resources of their countries. Brilliant ideas are not appreciated. Ideas with the potential to move our countries forward are stifled through harsh and selfish regimes of oppression and censorship that jail, drive into exile or kill Africans with the potential to contribute positively to their countries' socio-economic, cultural and political advancement. Thousands of African professionals serve Western societies and educate Western students while their own native societies and students remain stuck in socio-economic and political stagnation. African historians, economists, political scientists, and natural scientists research and produce knowledge on other countries rather than their own countries because entrenched regimes hate any

idea that challenges their unjust claim to personal ownership of their countries. Consequently, our countries remain that much intellectually starved.

The case must strongly be made to the voters that no human being is infallible; that all human beings are likely to make mistakes and that people have the right, even the duty to point out harmful mistakes committed by their leaders and governments for the simple reason that these mistakes directly affect the lives and well-being of the people concerned. In the Western countries mentioned above, no president can order the arrest and detention or torture or killing of a journalist or opposition member or leader for merely protesting or pointing out that the government is wrong or has made a mistake, or for calling for electoral or any other form of reform. It must be made clear that people have the constitutional right to oppose their government. In the West, leaders and governments encourage and make use of the intellectual resources of their people, regardless of political orientation or persuasion. This fact must be strongly emphasized to the voters. And it must be strongly emphasized to the voters that while as the Mandinka would say, *sembo leka buwo nyori, bari sembo buka banko nyori. Hakilo leka banko nyori* (It is power that moves excrement, but power cannot move a country. It is intelligence that moves a country). The people must be convinced that ideas, not guns and jails, are the building blocks of development and prosperity and that the West is so far ahead of Africa in terms of economic prosperity largely because they make use of their people's ideas. Every invention comes from the minds of human beings, and white people are mere human beings just like us. We are stuck in the rut of poverty because our leaders do not encourage the active use of our people's ideas. This is an important message that needs to be ceaselessly communicated to the African voters.

In essence, then, a new approach needs to be adopted by our alternative leadership both during and outside of election periods: an approach that goes beyond simply criticizing incumbent regimes to addressing some of the myths surrounding political leadership in Africa. These myths include the damaging and outmoded notions of mansaya and mansa kunda which are deeply ingrained in our people's collective consciousness. The religious belief that people cannot become leaders without God's will is a tricky space to manoeuvre because in a deeply religious community such as ours, there is no way to refute it convincingly. However, showing how religion condemns oppressive and unjust leaders and citing the example of precolonial societies where oppressive and unjust leaders were removed by the people is a viable strategy of dealing with our sit-tight and obviously oppressive and unjust leaders. Equally important are attempts to draw comparisons between our countries and some Western countries like America and Britain which have had several leaders while we are still saddled with a same president who behaves as if he literally owns us and our country and has the power of life and death over every single individual in our society. Why the West prospers and Africa remains mired in debilitating poverty and conflict is another issue that must be addressed during political rallies and at every possible opportunity. The fact that we are stuck in a rut of poverty and developmental stagnation is directly tied to the fact that our leaders stifle our peoples' intellectual energies and must also be persistently ad-

dressed. A direct and unmistakable connection must be made between the misery of the African people and the oppression and injustice of their leaders and governments. The African voter needs to be effectively persuaded and convinced that God is not to blame for their seemingly unending subjection to oppressive political and economic hardships.

(4 November 2016)

34

For Jammeh, God is yet to speak

In the hours and days following the Coalition's electoral victory, one could almost feel the smile returning to the face of the Smiling Coast of West Africa. A revolution that started at least 20 years ago bore its most tangible fruits on 1 December 2016. The electoral victory of Coalition 2016 and the heart-warming assurances from President-elect Adama Barrow were a genuine cause for optimism. Not optimism based on wishful thinking, but optimism springing from a deep feeling of pride and a genuine conviction that the incoming administration will respect the rule of law and the human rights of all Gambians and residents of The Gambia. One could almost see a Gambian renaissance.

But then the almost predictable event occurred. One week after conceding defeat and submitting that it was God's will that he hands over power, Jammeh declares that he has rejected the election results in their entirety because of an alleged error that nevertheless did not change the outcome. If it happened at all, the error merely shrunk the coalition candidate's lead from 9% to 4%. But of course, Jam-

meh will seize any excuse to stay in power, mainly because he fears he would be held accountable for the countless crimes he has committed against the Gambian people and the Gambian nation over the past 22 years.

Judging from his actions and pronouncements on the eve of the 1 December elections, it is clear that Jammeh did not think he was going to lose. He had declared that Gambia's electoral system was rig-proof and that for this reason, no demonstrations challenging the results would be allowed after the elections. On Election Day he had both the Internet and international phone connections to The Gambian shut off. He was expecting to win big and then accelerate his oppression and tighten his grip on the already suffocating country and its population. Now that he has lost, Gambia's electoral system has suddenly become susceptible to rigging and the electoral commission was neither independent nor God-fearing.

It remains to be seen how the Coalition leadership and the over 220, 000 ordinary Gambians who voted for them will react. But whatever they do, however they react, Jammeh's backpedaling on his pledge to accept the results in good faith goes to show just how fake his professed belief in God is. All Jammeh cares about is his personal safety and well-being. If staying in power means he has to spill the blood of innocent Gambians or drag the whole country into an intractable conflict he will do it. All his 2 December 2016 talk about God and Islam and accepting the verdict of the Gambian people was a delaying tactic designed to allow him to think of a way to hang on to power.

Being the devious Machiavellian tyrant he is, Jammeh spent the next few days frantically looking for an excuse to declare the results null and void. He found these excuses in Barrow's stated intention to respect human rights and the rule of law, and to rejoin the ICC and the Commonwealth, and in remarks by a coalition member that he would be prosecuted by the new government. And when it emerged somehow that there was a small error in the counting or allocating of the votes for one area, Jammeh got what he saw as a legitimate excuse to carry out his obnoxious plot to hijack, once again, the will of the Gambian people. Suddenly, God has never spoken and the voice of the people is not the voice of God. Suddenly, God did not bring him to power on Friday, 22 July 1994 and ask him to step down on Friday, 2 December 2016.

The bottom line is that Jammeh has further damaged himself by this ill-fated decision to declare the 1 December election results null and void. Whether he manages to cling on to power or not, this decision has further exposed his ugly nature to the universal community of human beings. It has shown that in spite of his loud protestations of belief in "the Almighty Allah", he in fact does not care about God or the feelings of the human beings he shares The Gambia with. He has shown himself to be a blind follower of Machiavelli's advice that a ruler may lie, cheat, kill and pretend to be pious if that enables him "to be alone in power." He certainly has not heard of the argument that Machiavelli's Prince was perhaps designed to lead its original intended audience to self-destruction by its brazen advice that the end always justifies the means, that the ruler should try to stay in power by any means necessary, even if it means killing his own blood brother.

Of course, it is futile to try reasoning with Jammeh. The only thing that can re-

Baba Galleh Jallow

move him from power is force, whether that force is of a natural or persuasive or coercive sort. One hopes that he sees something frightening enough to make him step down and hand over power peacefully. The only other alternatives are that he either dies in office sooner or later, or he is violently removed from power. For him, God has not yet spoken after all. Jammeh will only believe that God speaks when he is completely out of power and in some sort of blazing hell, whether of this world or the next.

(10 December 2016)

35

Big renaissance in little Gambia

One cannot help but feel a warm sense of pride at being a Gambian on the eve of 2017. Against the odds, Gambians have voted Yahya Jammeh out of office after inspiring the leaders of their political parties to present a united front against Jammeh's dictatorship of 22 years. Against the odds, the Coalition has won the elections by a good margin. Against the odds, Jammeh was quick to concede defeat and promise to step down. Against the odds, Gambians, from the president-elect to journalists of private and state media houses, have told Jammeh to his face that he simply has no authority to reject the election results. And against the odds, Electoral Commission Chair Alieu Momar Njai has told Jammeh and the world that "The election results are correct. Nothing can change that." And that if Jammeh takes the case to court, the electoral commission will account for every vote cast. One has every reason to be Gambia proud in the face of this big renaissance in little Gambia.

News that a group of faculty and staff at the University of The Gambia are boy-

cotting exams and their work at UTG in solidarity with the president-elect adds very welcome icing to the cake. While Jammeh had imposed himself on Gambians, his electoral defeat has given Gambians an excellent opportunity to show him to his face that he does not own The Gambia; that he is just one citizen among many, a *primus inter pares*; and that he can no longer defy the will of the Gambian people or clamp down upon the rights and dignities of the people with blatant impunity. The reactions of the Gambian people since Jammeh's U-turn over the election results inspires heightened confidence and a deep sense of pride in every honest Gambian. Not even the heavy presence of soldiers on the streets of Banjul and Serekunda has deterred Gambians from telling Jammeh to his face that he can no longer abuse us and our country with impunity. He has been roundly defeated at the polls, his dictatorship has been rejected by the people, and he should just pack up and go. Gambia is bigger than any single person and cannot indefinitely be held hostage by any single person. Gambia needs to move on.

There is no doubt that the political consciousness of the Gambian people has grown significantly since Jammeh seized power in a military coup 22 years ago. His many unfulfilled promises and his regime of blatant oppression and disregard for the rights and dignities of the Gambian people have slowly but surely generated righteous indignation and inspired a spirit of rebellion that led to his recent electoral defeat and the spirit of defiance that greeted his nullified rejection of the results a week after he conceded defeat. In this age of social media and backway tragedies, many Gambians have recognized their power and found that they have a loud and clear voice with which to rebuff any single person who thinks they can ride roughshod over the backs of the people. This is an excellent thing for our little Gambia because once a people recognizes and tastes their legitimate and boundless power, no one can ever oppress them again.

For the past 22 years, Gambians have suffered all manner of indignities at the hands of the Jammeh regime. Horrendous crimes have been committed by the Jammeh regime which still remain unsolved: Circumstances surrounding the 11 November 1994 incident at Yundum Barracks where a number of soldiers were killed remain shrouded in mystery. No one knows what happened to Lt. Basiru Barrow, Dot Faal and others who lost their lives that night. The gruesome murders of Finance Minister Ousman Koro Ceesay, Lt. Almano Manneh, and Deyda Hydara have never been seriously investigated. The soldiers that shot 14 innocent school children on April 10 and 11, 2000 were never arrested for their crimes. And the disappearance into thin air of NIA head Daba Marena and his colleagues, journalist Chief Ebrima Manneh and many others is shrouded in mystery. Yahya Jammeh's regime goes down in the annals of Gambian, African and world history as a regime of brutal mystery and darkness, a regime that felt it owed nobody any explanation for anything that happened under its watch. Jammeh himself acted as if he was totally above the law and mindlessly trampled upon the Gambian constitution, the laws and the dignity of the Gambian people with total impunity. He muzzles Gambians' freedoms of expression, of association and of assembly and arrogantly ignored and spat upon the advice of well-meaning Gambians. He insisted that because he was in power, he could do and say anything and was always

right. Now, too late for regret, he is forced to accept that might does not always make right, and that the longest day comes to an end. For whatever he now does, Jammeh knows that his time is up. It is now time for him to forever carry the burden of dark deeds and bad karma he has amassed over the past 22 years.

All of Jammeh's abuses have over the years fed the imagination and fueled the righteous indignation of the Gambian people. Gambians have resisted him from start to finish. At no point during the past 22 years was there a lull in the barrage of criticism, protest and opposition to Jammeh's brutal regime. The more he abused his power and tried to suppress dissent, the more outspoken Gambians have been. If Jammeh takes away one lesson from his experience as the brutal dictator of Gambia, it is that Gambians are stubborn, just as stubborn as he is, if not more stubborn than he is. He can never say that he scared all Gambians into accepting his outrageous words and actions without question. Gambians have always questioned and opposed and ridiculed him right up to his face, often likening him to an elephant on mosquito legs that was sure to crumble under its own weight sooner rather than later. The elephant has crumbled, and its attempts to get back on its mosquito legs are merely futile.

So while Jammeh's fall has come earlier than most Gambians especially Jammeh himself had expected, Gambia's rebirth has been happening for many years now, and is bound to accelerate in the coming weeks, months and years. We have always believed that a country is just as powerful as its own citizens. The level of political empowerment of the Gambian nation can only rise exponentially as we enter a new phase of a delightful if challenging renaissance. One hopes that the incoming administration will take practical steps to empower further the Gambian people to such an extent that no one will ever be able to abuse their power the way Jammeh did for the past 22 years.

We have repeatedly argued over the past few years that The Gambia needs to be transformed into a Family Nation through the agency of a Nation School. The serious political education and empowerment of the Gambian people can no longer be taken for granted, or entrusted to "civic education councils" of the bootlicking sort Jammeh faked. Every Gambian deserves to know exactly every section of the Gambian constitution and every aspect of all the doctrinal and institutional frameworks governing their lives, such as the doctrine of the separation of powers, term limits, judicial independence, and popular sovereignty among others. And they can learn about all these and much more through their national media and in their own national languages from well qualified professionals. In essence, we can turn The Gambia into one large university campus where everyone gets well educated in their civic rights and responsibilities. History of the sort Gambia has witnessed under Yahya Jammeh's brutal dictatorship should never be allowed to repeat itself in our dear motherland. It is time for a big renaissance in little Gambia.

(12 December 2016)

36

What Jammeh wants

Certainly, Jammeh's ultimate desire is to nullify totally the results of the 1 December elections and stay on in power. Over the past 22 years, he has repeatedly declared that neither elections nor coups can remove him from power. And while coups might be beyond his power to anticipate or control, elections are something he remains confident he can prevent from removing him from power. His shocking but not surprising about-face after conceding defeat to Mr. Barrow is the first manifestation of his assumed capacity to prevent elections from removing him from power.

But rejecting the election results, having soldiers occupy the electoral commission offices and filing a bogus petition with the non-existent Supreme Court are just first steps in Jammeh's plan to hang on to power. He has some ugly tricks under his sleeve that he intends to inflict on the Gambian people in the coming days and weeks, especially after his term expires on January 19. His promotion of several dozen members of the security forces just before he made his about-face is part of this ugly plan. Jammeh is selling his electoral defeat to the Gambian armed

forces as a “we honest soldiers against them corrupt civilians” scenario, just as he had done in the period leading up to his coup of 1994. He is making the army believe that it is them, patriotic armed forces of The Gambia, against a cohort of corrupt civilians and their foreign masters who want to exploit The Gambia’s resources, place the country and its people under foreign bondage, and corrupt the morals of Gambian society.

Having studied Jammeh for 22 years, we know for sure that he never really retired from the military. What Gambia has had for the past 22 years is a military dictator in civilian clothes, a classical wolf in sheepskins although he couldn’t hide his ravenous appetite for the flesh and blood of those he considers “lesser animals”. Honest members of the Gambia armed forces will tell you that Jammeh is fond of reminding them that he is part and parcel of the army and that it is their duty as custodians of Gambian security never to allow the country to fall into the hands of corrupt civilians and their foreign neocolonialist masters ever again. He is busy singing that same song now, away from the public eye and sadly, some elements of the Gambian armed forces are buying into it, perhaps because it is the most convenient and lucrative thing for them to do. Jammeh dared to reject the election results because he believes that he has the undivided loyalty of his fellow soldiers in the Gambia Armed Forces or at least significant sections of the Gambian military. He plans to use the army to nullify totally the results of the 1 December elections and stay on in power. And if Gambian people and the world don’t like it, well, you know what he says; they can all go to hell.

Having convinced the military that they need to rise up and prevent The Gambia from being taken over by corrupt civilians and their foreign masters, Jammeh is waiting for an opportunity to deliver the death blow to the aspirations of the Gambian people. He now hopes that the Gambian people go out into the streets to protest or demonstrate against his annulment of the elections. When that happens, he plans to suppress the protests or demonstrations brutally and then have all members of the Coalition leadership rounded up and thrown into prison. This explains why he has deployed armed soldiers all over Banjul and Serekunda. So far, his plan has been frustrated by the cool-headed manner in which the Coalition leadership and the Gambian public have reacted to his provocative insult against the will of the Gambian people. Because no one has come out to demonstrate, he is not yet able to have the Coalition leadership arrested. But that is precisely what he wants to do, given the slightest opportunity. It is imperative that the Coalition leadership keeps this important fact in mind: namely, that Jammeh will use any outbreak of public protest or demonstration against his rejection of the election results to have all of them arrested and thrown in jail so he could stay in power. If the Coalition plans on inaugurating Mr. Barrow as Gambian president on 19 January, they should keep this fact and mind and work on a Plan B.

Jammeh has his obnoxious plan all laid out and ready to go. He is just waiting for an opportunity to put it into motion. He will not listen to the ECOWAS leaders’ reasoning and their pleas to step down in the interest of peace and the security of the Gambian people. Jammeh does not care about the peace and security of the Gambian people. Jammeh will also not listen to the United Nations, or the

United States, or Senegal, or anyone for that matter. He does not care about threats of serious sanctions, unless those sanctions are in the form of military intervention, which is the only thing that can remove him from power, barring a sudden natural death or arrest by members of the Gambian security forces. It would be a disastrous mistake to expect that Jammeh will willingly step down when his term expires in January 2017. While that is the date stipulated in the Gambian constitution, Jammeh does not care about the constitution either, as he has repeatedly demonstrated for the past 22 years.

If Jammeh is not somehow persuaded or forced to leave before 18 January 2017 he is not going to leave on that date. In fact, he would be eagerly awaiting any sign of protest or demonstration in The Gambia which he would promptly use as a pretext to arrest all the coalition leaders, including Adama Barrow and throw them in jail. At his chosen moment thereafter, he would drag them before some kangaroo court manned by mercenary judges, bring bogus charges against them, and give them long prison sentences. He would then have succeeded in inflicting a fatal blow on the highest aspirations of the Gambian people and would continue his reign of terror for as long as is possible for him. If that happens, we may just be saddled with Jammeh “for a billion years”. This man has no conscience and will lose no sleep over the blood he will spill or the families he will destroy.

If the international community is serious about helping Gambians deal with this brutal dictator, they should act now rather than later. If they intend to send in a military intervention force, they should do so as soon as possible. This is, of course, not an option Gambians want by any stretch of the imagination. But the coalition leadership should not reject that possibility out of hand. For one thing, removing Jammeh from power will not only serve the purpose of allowing Mr. Barrow and his government to take their rightful place as the new custodians of the Gambian constitution. It would also serve the purpose of getting a brutal and oppressive Machiavellian tyrant off the tired backs of the Gambian people. While we hate to imagine any form of violence in our dear little country, unfortunately, it might be the only viable option for the removal of a bloodthirsty tyrant who is intent upon indefinitely holding the Gambian people hostage. If the international community fails to act decisively one way or the other before 18 January, and barring the decisive intervention of well-meaning members of the Gambia Armed Forces, Yahya Jammeh will eventually frustrate the Gambian public to such an extent that mass demonstrations would be inevitable. And when that happens, he will get what he wants: he will brutally repress the demonstrations and promptly have the coalition leadership arrested and thrown in jail. Gambians and the international community must know that if it boils down to what reason dictates or what God wants versus what Yahya Jammeh wants, Yahya Jammeh will do what Yahya Jammeh wants.

(16 December 2016)

Author’s Note: Please share as widely as possible. We need to expose and frustrate this tyrant’s hideous plot.

37

No retreat, no surrender

We the people of The Gambia are determined not to allow Yahya Jammeh to strangle our beautiful new Gambian renaissance. For 22 years, Yahya Jammeh has treated The Gambia as if it was his personal property and Gambians as if they were nothing but his personal slaves with no right to disagree with anything he said or did. For 22 years he inflicted untold suffering on innumerable numbers of families and communities, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, grandmothers, grandfathers and innocent children. We have even seen a six-week-old baby locked up in jail under Yahya Jammeh's heartless tyranny. He has brutally devastated Gambian families and caused untold misery to innumerable numbers of Gambians by killing their loved ones and often sole breadwinners, or throwing them in jail without any charges or through blatantly trumped-up charges and kangaroo courts presided over by foreign mercenary judges who are only after their own selfish interests. He has turned spineless sections of the Gambian population into unconscionable spies, liars and brutal torturers of their fellow Gambian citizens. Those days are over. We are taking back our country and if Jammeh does not like it, he can have a taste of his own medicine: he can go to hell where he rightfully belongs. We are calling Yahya Jammeh's bluff and we must continue calling

his bluff with all our might.

In his pathetic delusion, Yahya Jammeh thinks that he can continue lording it over Gambians against their will. A couple of days ago, he had the audacity to summon a crowd of religious leaders to State House because, he said to them, “the people listen to you”. Well, if Yahya Jammeh will not listen to the people, how comes he expects the people to listen to him or any religious leader? He absolutely has no right to tell anyone to listen to anyone else. And if any religious leaders were foolhardy enough to try telling Gambians to listen to Yahya Jammeh, they will be asked to go to hell. In his meeting with the religious leader, Yahya Jammeh declared that he wanted peace and unity and forgiveness in The Gambia. No, he does not. The peace, unity and forgiveness he speaks of is of the hostile, divisive and vindictive kind he has inflicted upon us for the past 22 years and we totally reject it out of hand. Let Yahya Jammeh not preach to us about peace and unity because he is the one who has threatened the peace and unity of the Gambian people for the past 22 years. Let Yahya Jammeh not preach to us about the evils of tribalism because he is the one who has been callously trying to fan the flames of tribal discord in The Gambia. The Coalition which the Gambian people supported was not formed on the basis of tribalism and both its leadership and its supporters see themselves as Gambians, not members of individual tribes of the sort infesting Jammeh’s sick mind. On 1 December the Gambian people totally rejected Yahya Jammeh’s tribal bigotry; so he should shove his hypocritical rant about peace, unity, forgiveness and tribalism up where it belongs.

Since his arrogant and insulting rejection of the Word of God and the will of a significant majority of the Gambian people, Gambians have asserted their power by telling him in no uncertain terms that he cannot and will not be allowed to hold us and our country hostage beyond 18 January 2017. The pressure must be kept up and increased in the days ahead. We must shout louder and insist more strongly and stubbornly that Gambia belongs to all Gambians, not just to Yahya Jammeh and we are not Yahya Jammeh’s powerless and voiceless slaves to be treated with total disrespect and oppressed with total impunity. We must insist that power belongs to us the people and that any Gambian government must henceforth be a government of the people, for the people and by the people. We must continue to insist uncompromisingly that Yahya Jammeh step down and allow the new Gambian renaissance to blossom into the kind of peaceful, democratic and loving society we want for our country. We must refuse to allow Yahya Jammeh to deprive us of our God-given rights as natural and sovereign citizens of The Gambia. We must show Yahya Jammeh that true power belongs to us the people and that we the Gambian people are the true custodians of national sovereignty in The Gambia. We must show Yahya Jammeh that there will be no retreat and no surrender to his hideous design to deprive us of our well-earned, well-deserved and long overdue reprieve from his brutal dictatorship and his mindless regime of brutal oppression.

As of today, 17 December 2016, a large number of Gambian groups and organizations have issued statements condemning Yahya Jammeh’s obnoxious plan to continue enslaving us and our country. Among the many Gambian groups and organizations on the ground that have boldly come forward and told Yahya Jammeh

to his face that enough is enough are the Pact of Influential Lecturers at the University of The Gambia, the Gambia Labour Congress, the Gambia Bar Association, the Gambia Teacher's Union, the Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Gambia Medical and Dental Association, the National Association of Gambia Nurses and Midwives, the University of The Gambia Faculty and Staff Association, the University of The Gambia Student body, the Gambia Press Union, the Sarahule Youth Development Organization, and the Gambia National Youth Parliament. As a peace-loving, truth-loving and justice-loving community of deeply religious people, hundreds of thousands of Gambians, no doubt including some who voted for Jammeh on 1 December are adamant that he must do what is right and step down. And he must step down. There should be no retreat, no surrender.

Gambians know that we have the full support of all honest and well-meaning members of the international community. The Senegalese government and people are unequivocal in their position that Jammeh must go. ECOWAS just officially took a position that Jammeh must go, following their meeting in Abuja today, Saturday, 17 December 2016. According to some reliable sources, if Jammeh insists on staying, ECOWAS will send a military intervention force led by Senegal to make sure that he goes. The same sources suggest that all ECOWAS heads of state have agreed to attend Barrow's inauguration on Thursday, 19 January in a show of solidarity with the Gambian people. The United Nations also insists that Jammeh must go and has already fired a warning shot by cancelling General Ousman Badjie's visa to visit Gambian peace keeping troops in Darfur, Sudan. The United States and all Western European countries are behind us. Even the 57-member Organization of Islamic Conference has issued a statement asking Yahya Jammeh to respect the will of the Gambian people. If Yahya Jammeh does not heed all these voices of the international community, we must force him to hear our voices through the sheer force of our words and actions.

In order to show Yahya Jammeh that power truly belongs to we, the people, all Gambian organizations that have issued statements asking Yahya Jammeh to step down must follow their statements with practical action. Those that have threatened to stay away from work must make sure their threats are credible by following through with them. It is time to show Jammeh in no uncertain terms that there can be no government without the people, that the government is a servant of the people, that it is we the people who pay the salaries of the president, the military and all Gambia government officers. Flexing our muscles through nonviolent civil disobedience will ultimately make Gambia ungovernable and perhaps make ECOWAS military intervention unnecessary.

We can start by actively responding to the Gambia Diaspora Consultative Council's call for all Gambians to observe a stay at home day this Tuesday, December 20. Let us #ShutItDown and #ShutJammehDown once and for all. There should be #NoRetreatNoSurrender.

(17 December 2016)

Author's Note: Please share as widely as possible. We must protect and nurture this beautiful renaissance in little Gambia. #JammehMustGo!

38

You said it, Mr. Jammeh

“But this is where the Almighty Allah said, your time is up and I thank the Almighty Allah for His decision. I will never question this decision.”

Hello Mr. outgoing President Yahya Jammeh. Please allow us to have a small conversation with you in the light of the current dangerous situation you have created for our dear country. Do you recognize the quote at the top of this essay, Mr. Jammeh? Sure you do. They are your own words, uttered on Friday, 2 December 2016. You see Mr. Jammeh, we truly believe that God has spoken and you said so yourself on Friday 2 December 2016. So we cannot stop wondering just how, not why, you decided to deny the Almighty Allah’s decision after submitting graciously to it. Don’t you think that Satan the great deceiver has deceived you, just as he deceived our first ancestors Adama and Awa? Anyway, let’s take a little journey back in time to 2 December 2016 to look at what you said on that day and what its implications are for you personally and for our dear little country, especially our women and children whom you profess to love so much that you will die for them.

In order to make sure that our history is properly recorded and that we can easily

remind you, we have taken the trouble to transcribe your entire speech of Friday, 2 December 2016, most parts of which we will share with you as we remind you that your Almighty Allah has indeed spoken. Here is how you started your concession speech that day, which you have since disowned as if it never came out of your very own horse's mouth. As usual, you started by invoking the name of the Almighty Allah and thanking him four times:

"Bisimilahi Rahmani Rahim. Alhamdulilai Rabilalamina, Alhamdulilai Rabilalamina, Alhamdulilai Rabilalamina, Alhamdulilai Rabilalamina."

"Fellow Gambians and friends of The Gambia, APRC supporters, militants, yai compins, campaign managers, the women of The Gambia, the children of The Gambia, my children. First of all, I want to thank every one of you, for the support for the past 22 years. I have always made it very clear I will never rule this country without your mandate since we started elections. And I will never cheat or dispute the elections, because this is the most transparent, rig-proof elections in the whole world. You have spoken in no uncertain terms. Remember that I have always told you that even if my opponent leads by one vote, I will accept the results because they are transparent. Our system of election is winner take all."

Now Mr. outgoing president, you certainly cannot deny that you made the above remarks about never ruling the country without our mandate and that you will never dispute the elections because our election system is rig-proof. You certainly cannot deny that Mr. Barrow won the election by at least one vote. How then can you turn around and say the elections were rigged just because you lost? Just in case you failed to notice, electoral commissions do not steal elections for opposition candidates in Africa. If they do steal at all, they steal for sitting presidents, if only to save their own skins. No one has ever heard of an African electoral commission rigging the vote for the opposition, although there are countless stories of how they rig the vote for incumbents. So how can you say that the Gambian IEC rigged the elections for Mr. Barrow? Surely that is just a piece of unfunny smutty fiction in your mind that you are now trying to impose on the Gambian people? And then, how could you make those remarks if the Almighty Allah did not will that you speak them? You know very well that you cannot open your mouth if the Almighty Allah does not will it. You know very well that whatever happened on 1-2 December could never have happened if the Almighty Allah did not will it. It was by the Almighty Allah's will that the following words poured out of your own horse's mouth:

"I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Adama Barrow for [sic] his victory. It's a clear victory because our system says simple majority. I wish him all the best and I wish all Gambians the best. As a true Muslim, who believes in the Almighty Allah, I will never question Allah's decision today or at any material time. I came on a Friday 22nd of the month of July 1994. Today Friday the 2nd of December 2016, you Gambians have decided that I should take the back seat. You have voted for somebody to lead our country, this is our country, and I wish you all the best. I have wished that we continue our programme of development. But this is where the Almighty Allah said, your time is up and I thank the Almighty Allah for His decision. I will never question this decision. I believe in the Almighty

Allah. As a slave and servant of the Almighty Allah I will never question what happens to me because nothing happens without the will of the Almighty Allah.”

Now Mr. Jammeh, how can you say such things and then turn right around and question the Almighty Allah’s decision? Do you know how many times you mentioned the Almighty Allah’s name in that short segment of your speech Mr. Jammeh? Seven times! We took time to count them because we wanted to make sure that you know that you are denying the will of the Almighty Allah; the very Almighty Allah in whose name you like to swear, swagger and brag. We are sure you know that the Almighty Allah is pretty mad at you right now. Beware of God’s wrath, Mr. Jammeh. If you do not redeem yourself right now, we dread to even imagine what the Almighty Allah will do to you. You are making light of the Almighty Allah by questioning His decision.

And as you know Mr. outgoing president Jammeh and soon-to-be former Babili Mansa, the voice of the people is indeed the voice of God. And we were so proud to see that you took time to recognize that the Gambian people had spoken, which of course means that God has spoken. Here are more of your own words on the matter, transcribed word for word from your own horse’s mouth. You said:

“You the Gambian people have spoken and I want to thank you for all the support for the past 22 years. I will always love you. I will live and die for you. But this time around, not as a president but as a champion farmer. This country, I’m married to this country. I’m not moving an inch. Some of the members of the cabinet and some of you civil servants who may not have a job, come to Kanilai Farms if you want to be a farmer, because farming is in my blood and I want to eat what I grow and grow what I eat. This is a programme I had for all Gambians as a president. Now that I am no longer the president, I will continue my programme and vision because eating what you grow and growing what you eat makes you healthier and more independent. I want to once again thank the youth of this country. I want to thank the women of this country. And I want to thank the schoolchildren of this country who stand hours under [sic] the hot sun to show me their love. I will always love you. I will always love you and I will live to love you because you are the future of this country. I do hope that the free education that we promised, it was not an empty promise. Whatever I promised you I swore to the Holy Quran.” [Here you raised the Holy Quran from your desk, and then you continued] “The Holy Quran belongs to the Almighty Allah and as a Muslim, to prove that what I am saying is not false, I swear to this Holy Quran.” [You lowered and lifted the Holy Quran up again and continued] “It is only to this Holy Quran that I swore, that I will always rule this country with the mandate of the people and I will never cheat at any election. Whether if, even if, the election system is different, I want to make sure that when I rule this country, I rule with a clear conscience without any question mark hanging over my head because if I cheat I’m no longer a Muslim. Allah doesn’t like cheating. Allah doesn’t like lying. I have never lied to you Gambian people. Whatever I have said is genuine and I live by that.”

Well, well, Mr. Jammeh. ‘Nough said now. You just swore to the Holy Quran that you will only rule this country with the mandate of the people. How come you now say you do not accept the mandate of the people? Did you not swear by the

Holy Quran that “Whatever I have said is genuine and I live by that”? Now Mr. Jammeh, you certainly are not living by what you said to the Gambian people on Friday 2 December [2016]? How do you explain that? Don’t you think that Satan convinced you to lie at least this one time in your entire life? We think that Satan the great deceiver is deceiving you into denying the will of Almighty Allah after you accepted it. We are sure you know that’s Satan’s specialty dangling seeming truths and worldly power and riches and pleasure before our eyes in order to lead us into hell and then abandon us. Beware of the great deceiver, Mr. Jammeh. Beware of the fire of hell which, as you know, the Almighty Allah promises to fill with stones and men who deny His will and fall for the juicy temptations of Satan the great deceiver. Repent Jammeh and redeem yourself before it’s too late. Here you are again, word for word, from your own horse’s mouth. It was you who said:

“On this note, once again, I want to thank the president-elect Adama Barrow. Let him forget the past, what happened during the campaign. I want you to understand that he is the president of all Gambians irrespective of who voted for him and who didn’t vote for him. And I want to assure you that he has my support in maintaining peace and security in this country. The peace and security of this country, the stability of this country is what guarantees prosperity and development for every Gambian. Without peace and security, not a Muslim, not a Christian, will be able to worship the Almighty Allah. So I hope that he will be able to rein in his supporters; let them understand that we are all Gambians. As I said, until I hand over to him, peace and security, I will not compromise. And as long as I live also, because I’m not going anywhere I’m going to my village, the peace and security of this country is sacrosanct.”

Now, now, Mr. Jammeh! You got to be kidding us, right? You said you will not compromise the peace and security of our dear country, but is that not exactly what you have been doing since your ill-fated rejection on 9 December of the Almighty Allah’s will? You very well know that your ill-fated decision to reject the Almighty Allah’s will threatens to destroy the peace and security you swore never to compromise and bring about fitna [violence], the very fitna you so solemnly warned against when you continued in the following words, coming directly from your own horse’s mouth:

“Allah doesn’t like fitna and we should not encourage fitna for whatever reason, because at the end of the day, we lose. Each time we Africans fight, there are mothers carrying babies, running across. Some are raped in the process. Children are raped. Some drown, some die in the sea. That is not our wish for this country and it will not happen in this country as long as I am alive. I have no reason to interfere in the government, the new government that you have elected. You elected your government, you have your government. But the peace and security of this country I will not compromise because if there is no peace, God forbid, I will not be able to worship Allah the way I want to and nobody can deprive me of that. Let us work for peace. And I want all Gambians to reconcile. We’ve made decisions. We voted. There is a winner. Make sure you all work for peace. For APRC supporters, maintain [the] peace because this is our philosophy. Maintain peace and stability because this is what is good for this country.”

Yes, indeed, Mr. Jammeh. We voted and there is a clear winner. And yes, indeed, Mr. Jammeh you said it: Allah doesn't like fitna. But you Mr. Jammeh are the very one causing fitna in our dear little country. You just said that when there is fitna, women and children are raped, mothers with their babies suffer; some drown and some die in the sea. Yet, you Mr. Jammeh are the very same Mr. Jammeh who is bringing fitna to our country by denying the will of the Almighty Allah. We can only hope and pray that Satan the great deceiver does not succeed in making you do such an evil thing, even though he seems to have a very powerful grip on your soul right now and you are hell-bent on doing his will rather than accepting the will of the Almighty Allah and doing the right thing.

One thing that really baffles us now, and has really baffled us for the past 22 years, is that you seem to believe that The Gambia is your personal property and that only you have the right to be our president as long as you are alive and kicking. How many times have you told us to our faces that you will rule us for a billion years, whether we like it or not? How many times have you told us to our faces that neither elections nor coups can remove you from power and if we don't like it we can go to hell? Your current rejection of the will of the Almighty Allah is further evidence that you really want to impose yourself on the Gambian people whether we like it or not. The strange thing is that when you did the honourable thing and conceded electoral defeat on 2 December [2016] you reminded us that The Gambia belongs to all Gambians and not to any particular tribe and by extension, any particular individual. Yet, now you are insisting that you personally own our country and will not step down even though the Almighty Allah says you should. But let's hear what you said on the subject again, directly from your own horse's mouth. It was you who said:

"This country also, let me assure you, belongs to all of us. It does not belong to any particular tribe. One thing we must avoid in this country is ethnic conflict. We have seen ethnic conflict, the devastating effect of ethnic conflict. We have seen it in Rwanda. We have seen it in Central African Republic. Let us not be tribalist. But above all, let us believe in the Almighty Allah and that the Almighty Allah created all of us equally. Tribalism or racism is evil. It's unacceptable. During the (garbled word here) I made it very clear, how racism and tribalism started. Under my guard for 22 years, blacks, whites, greens whatever they are lived in this country peacefully. For 22 years of my rule, nobody was ever beaten in this country for being white, brown, Asian or whatever. Because that is what a true Muslim should be. And I thank The Gambia for being a truly, godly smiling coast."

Now, Mr. Jammeh we need not dwell on this ugly tribalism thing. Suffice it to say that before your 22 years of rule, we had no tribalism or tribal politics in The Gambia. It was you, Mr. outgoing president and soon-to-be former Babili Mansa who started insulting certain tribes and making ugly insinuations about tribal politics. We thank the Almighty Allah that so far, you have failed to stoke the flames of tribal hatred among Gambians because we are all good Muslims, good Christians and good neighbours regardless of our ethnic or religious affiliations. We also don't like the fact that you said "for 22 years of my rule." Presidents don't rule, Mr. Jammeh. They lead. But no surprise here because you are a self-described

“dictator for development”, whatever that means. Anyway, after suddenly disowning tribalism, you proceeded to thank all Gambians and reaffirmed how the Almighty Allah willed Adama Barrow and the Coalition’s victory. Here you are again from your own horse’s mouth:

“On this note, I want to thank every one of you. Those who supported us, in one way or the other, those who campaigned for us. Allah has decided. Allah has decided that 2nd, that today Friday the 2nd of December, you the Gambians have decided that I’m no longer going to be your president. I will hand over, *Inshallah* without fail to the president-elect, Mr. Adama Barrow in January. He can work on his transition team if he wants. If he wants to work with us also it is, I have no problems with that. For the sake of you the Gambian people and for the sake of the country, with my experience I will help him work towards the transition whilst I pack . . . (here your audience interrupted you with applause) to go and work on my farm.”

Mr. Jammeh, did you hear yourself say that “Allah has decided” and that “Gambians have decided” that you are no longer going to be their president? Did you not promise that you “will hand over, *Inshallah* without fail, to the president-elect, Mr. Adama Barrow in January”? Why then are you now denying Allah’s decision and the decision of Gambians, Mr. Jammeh? Why do you make light of Allah’s decision, Mr. Jammeh? Why did you go on to assure us Gambians that you love us, that you will die for us, and that you will always stand for us when you are now threatening to bring about death and destruction to our country? And why would you wish us and Adama Barrow Godspeed only to turn around and try to bring mayhem into our country? Just in case you don’t remember, here you are again in your own words, direct from your own horse’s mouth:

“On this note, I wish you Godspeed. And Adama Barrow, I wish you Godspeed. But remember that the country is greater than any tribe. I wish you all the best. Gambians I wish you all the best. Thank you, for being with me for 22 years.” [Here you got a standing ovation from your audience. And then you said]: “*Asalamalaikum Warahmatullah Watala Wabarakatuhou. Alsamaday*” [Here, you waved your right hand as if in good bye, stood up, and started shaking hands as your audience starts leaving the big table. But then you sat down and started talking again, affirming your undying loyalty to your party, the APRC. You said]: “Let me also make it clear, that I am APRC to the core. I will never betray the party. I live for the party because this is the greatest party we have ever created.” [Here, your audience claps for you again, and you continue shaking hands; then you sat down again. Your audience returns to their seats and you continue talking, asking all those in service to continue serving our country. Here’s how you put it directly from your own horse’s mouth]: “And for those in service, especially the civil servants, serve any government that comes if the government wants your service. Your service is to the nation. In the event that you are not wanted don’t lose hope. Whatever becomes of you is the will of the Almighty Allah. And if you become bitter about it, if you become bitter about it, you don’t believe in God. This is destiny. Everything is predestined. Have faith. Believe in God. Thank you.” [Here there was some half-hearted clapping again. You turned off your mic and picked up the phone to

talk to Mr. Barrow. It was, to use 2016's word of the year, a surreal moment for all of us. Here you are again, in your own words, from your own horse's mouth):

"Hallo Your Excellency President-elect, Mr. Barrow. I'm fine. I'm calling you to wish you all the best. The Gambian people have spoken and I have no reason to contest the will of the All Mighty Allah. I wish you all the best. The country will be in your hands in January, and you are assured of my guidance on your transition. I don't mean in selecting people who will be in your government, but you have to work with me as I pack to go to Kanilai while I hand over the State House to you. You are the elected president of The Gambia and I wish you all the best. I have no ill will and I wish you all the best." [Here, your audience claps for you as you listened to Mr. Barrow speak on the other end of the line, and you say): "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Though I will be a farmer in Kanilai. Pardon? Convey my congratulations to your entire team. This is transparent. This is the will of Allah and as a Muslim I accept it in good faith. The Gambian people have chosen you. After 22 years I am grateful to the Almighty Allah for that. I remember I came on a Friday the 22nd of July. I lost on Friday the 2nd of December. Allah is telling me that my time is up and I hand over graciously, with gratitude to the Gambian people and gratitude to the Almighty Allah to you. Yes. What date? 1965? So you were born before independence? So you are few months older than me; all the best. I think that's why they didn't call you old pa." [Here, you laugh hardly showing your big white teeth. And you continued]: "I wish you all the best Mr. Barrow. Okay? And you have my full support. Let us make sure that you work towards maintaining peace and stability because without peace and stability let me make it clear you cannot achieve anything in anywhere in Africa. I wish you all the best. Yes, we'll work on it, yes we'll meet next week. It depends on your calendar; you are the president-elect now I'm the outgoing president. So, you give us time, and, and from Tuesday I will be free. Yes. Balla Jahumpa, Balla Jahumpa. You know Honourable Balla Jahumpa my campaign manager. Yes, he spoke to you this morning as well. Oh, Mr. Barrow you are also coughing (Here, you laugh and coughed into your neck scarf and continued): "Mr. Barrow you are also coughing like me [you laugh again]. "All the best, my dear, all the best, okay! I have no ill-feelings towards you. Yes, I will hand you over to Balla so that you can talk to him. I wish you all the best Mr. Barrow. And I wish all the Gambian people all the best whether they support me or not. The country is greater than all of us. Thank you very much. All the best. Thank you. Thank you."

There was more clapping as you handed the phone over to Mr. Jahumpa, adjusted your grand boubou and started talking again. You thanked everyone from your office staff to the National Assembly and everyone who served our country under what you called your "22 years of progressive rule". You then proceeded in the following words, directly from your own horse's mouth:

"I thank you Almighty Allah for answering to most of my prayers on behalf of you the Gambian people. I have no regrets. I've done what is impossible in Africa" [Here, there was some hesitant clapping by your audience]. "I've done what is impossible in Africa in 22 years without oil, without what. I'm grateful to the Almighty Allah. And this is destiny. Alsamaday! Thank you." [Here, you got

another standing ovation from your audience which you interrupted with more words from your own horse's mouth]: "I want to thank members of the security, the armed forces, police, and service chiefs. I want to thank GRTS, the staff and especially the camera men because the camera men especially Sankung, Njie and Agil. And others. I take the major part of the dust but I think they take the rest of the dust, sitting on the back of the pick-up, trying to film, whether we are on the highway or in the bush. I want to thank all of you from the bottom of my heart. May the Almighty Allah guide and protect all of you. May the Almighty Allah grant you what you wish in your hearts, as long as it is good for the country and good for you. And I wish all the Gambians all the best. I'm grateful that you gave me the chance to serve you for 22 years. May the Almighty Allah reward you all. The women, the children, the youth of this country; I have nothing against men, but through the 22 years journey, in whatever field of endeavour I was involved in, if it were not for the Gambian women and youth, we would have failed. Thank you Gambian women, from the bottom of my heart. May the Almighty Allah grant all what you wish for yourselves. May the Almighty Allah guide and protect the children of this country, the youth of this country, the women of this country, and every citizen and non-citizen in this beautiful country The Gambia. *Asalamalai-kum Warahmatullah Watala Wabarakatuhou.*"

And here you ended your concession speech amid clapping as the video ends. Now then Mr. out-going president Jammeh and soon-to-be former Babili Mansa, if you love the Gambian women and children so much, why are you putting their lives and futures in jeopardy by denying the will of the Gambian people and the will of the Almighty Allah? Why are you bringing fitna into the lives of the very women and children you call your own, the very people you profess to love so much? Well, we are not trying to make you see reason because the Almighty Allah has already decided and you know what happens to people who defy the will of the Almighty Allah. *Alsamaday*, Mr. outgoing president and soon-to-be former Babili Mansa. We hope against hope that you see reason and do the right thing by accepting the will of the Almighty Allah. On our side, we might yet have reason to have another conversation with you again in the near future, Insha Allah. May the Almighty Allah defeat Satan and all those who follow him and save our dear little Gambia and all honest Gambians from fitna. We say unto you Mr. Jammeh, Maa saa Allahu. La qawla walaa quwata illah Billahi. May God's will be done. There is no power but God's.

(21 December 2016)

Author's Note: Please share as widely as possible. Jammeh cannot deny the will of God expressed through the will of the sovereign people of The Gambia. We must protect and nurture this beautiful Gambian Renaissance. #JammehMustGo!

39

Please don't die for Jammeh

Dear CDS Badjie and members of the Gambia Armed Forces,

Just over a week ago on 14 December 2016 we wrote an open letter asking you to find a way to persuade outgoing president Yahya Jammeh to step down peacefully and avoid bringing about violent conflict in our country. Over the past week, our country's security situation has grown increasingly precarious, causing widespread fear among innocent men, women and children and adversely affecting our economy. During the same period we have also seen an increasing number of Gambian civil society organizations and individuals pleading with Yahya Jammeh to step down and prevent our country from sliding into conflict. These internal Gambian voices have been complemented by the voices of Gambian ambassadors, professionals and private individuals in the Diaspora. We all have also heard the concerned voices of many countries and international organizations around the world pleading with Yahya Jammeh to see reason and step down in the interest of peace and stability in our little peace-loving country and the safety of our parents, children, families and relatives who just want to live their lives in peace.

Unfortunately, in the face of this near universal chorus of pleas from both at home and abroad, Yahya Jammeh stubbornly refuses to budge and is willing to plunge our country into a violent conflict which will shed the blood of innocent people and destroy our country. Does Yahya Jammeh want God himself to step down to earth and plead with him to step down? Can Yahya Jammeh defy the will of the entire world and still win, as he says he will? Why does Yahya Jammeh shut his eyes against the reality that after 22 years in power, it is time for him to move on and allow The Gambia to move on? When Yahya Jammeh declares that he will not step down because he is not a coward, our response is that he is refusing to step down precisely because he is a coward. It is never cowardly to do the right thing. It is always cowardly to refuse to do the right thing, especially if refusing to do the right thing means sacrificing the lives of innocent people. In any case, the issue at stake is not about chest pounding and empty verbal bravado. It is about doing the right thing by God and by the Gambian people. It is about avoiding a conflict that will claim the lives of innocent Gambians who have nothing to lose if Jammeh steps down after enjoying power for 22 long years. Jammeh is trying to protect nobody but himself and his personal selfish interests.

We assume you have heard the news that ECOWAS has formally decided that if Yahya Jammeh refuses to step down on or before January 19, they will send a military intervention force to oust him and make sure that the will of the Gambian people is done. It is clear to all right-thinking people that there is no way Yahya Jammeh can win a war against the combined forces of ECOWAS with possible support from French Special Forces and other international players. Of course, if there is an external intervention force, you our dear brothers and sisters in the Gambia Armed Forces will be the ones to risk your lives in the line of fire. We Gambians do not want a single member of the Gambia Armed Forces losing their lives or suffering any kind of injury in defence of Yahya Jammeh. You Gambian soldiers come from us, the people. You are our sons and daughters, our brothers and sisters, and our relatives and friends. You also have your immediate families who look up to you, who depend on you for their day-to-day sustenance, and who love you more than Yahya Jammeh will ever care for you. Your spouses and loved ones need you; your parents and blood relatives need you; your children need you to be there for them as they grow up. We the Gambian people need you to stay alive to defend our country should the need arise in the future. The need to take fire for us does not arise in the present circumstances. If you take fire, you take fire for Yahya Jammeh, who is not worth it if only because he will no longer be your Commander-in-Chief after 19 January 2017. Why then would you die for him?

In essence, we are saying to you our dear brothers and sisters of the Gambia Armed Forces that the current crisis, especially after 19 January, will not be about defending our country or our people – the majority of whom have voted for a new president and want to move peacefully on with their lives. The current crisis, especially after 19 January, will be about citizen Yahya Jammeh, who wants you to sacrifice your lives and destroy the futures of your families, your children and the children of other Gambian families so he can try to do an impossible thing – hang on to power after clearly losing a free and fair election. If you take up arms

against the Gambian people or against an intervention force, you are risking your lives for Yahya Jammeh, not for The Gambia or the Gambian people. Do not let Yahya Jammeh use and abuse your precious lives for his own personal and selfish interests. Please do not risk your lives for Yahya Jammeh. He is no longer your commander-in-chief after 19 January.

In the light of Yahya Jammeh's insane insistence on staying in power even if it means sacrificing your precious lives and the lives of many other innocent people, we are asking you again to please persuade Yahya Jammeh to step down peacefully and save our country from war. If he refuses to step down for God's sake and for the sake of 1.8 million Gambians, we ask that you simply refuse to sacrifice your lives for him. If you die defending Yahya Jammeh, you die defending evil and you will never assume a place of honour in Gambian history. Rather, you will forever be remembered as soldiers who chose to defend an unjust tyrant against the will of God and of the Gambian people. You will be remembered as soldiers who helped Yahya Jammeh in his nefarious determination to stay in power even if that means destroying our country. And then what will happen to the innocent children you leave behind? What will happen to your brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, widows, widowers, parents? How will your mothers and fathers bear the pain of losing you to such an unworthy and evil cause? The point we are making is that if Yahya Jammeh refuses to listen to reason and common sense whether from you, from the Gambian community at large or from the international community, please do not sacrifice your lives for him. His time is up. He is going out one way or the other. You have your lives, your careers and your families to look after. And you have a country to guard and defend. Please don't die for Jammeh.

In the event that military intervention happens - which it will if Jammeh refuses to heed the voice of reason - please remove your uniforms and stay at home with your families, drop your weapons and raise your arms, or otherwise cooperate and help in any way possible to make sure that Yahya Jammeh complies with the will of God and the will of the Gambian people. This will not be an act of cowardice or surrender. In fact, it will be an act of honour and courage on your part in support of truth and reason, and in the interest of our dear little country and thousands of innocent Gambians including your own families. No one will penalize you for doing that because that will be the right thing and the lawful thing to do. It will not be against any constituted and legitimate authority, but in support of the sovereign national interest which you are sworn to safeguard. Remember that Yahya Jammeh's term as legitimate president of The Gambia ends at midnight on 18 January 2017. After that date and time, he and anyone supporting him will be guilty of treason and treasonable felony if they oppose the government that has the mandate of the Gambian people. Please do not die for Jammeh or allow Jammeh's mad greed for power to destroy your futures and the futures of your families and our dear, peaceful country. If this war happens, and we hope Jammeh sees reason to prevent it, it will not be one Jammeh and whoever supports him can win by any stretch of the imagination. If Yahya Jammeh wants to commit suicide, let him go ahead and do it. Please don't die for Jammeh. The choice is entirely yours.

We want to seize this opportunity also to address briefly our brothers and sisters

in Jammeh's cabinet. We are certain that the intelligent men and women in Jammeh's cabinet know very well that he is fighting a losing battle. Therefore, we are asking you to either issue a joint statement asking him to step down or even better, to resign from his government now before it comes crashing down around you and thereby implicating you in an aiding and abetting scenario. We all know that Jammeh's time is up. His government is over or will be over exactly at midnight on January 18, 2017. His ship is sinking. Do not allow yourself to sink with it and jeopardize your personal safety, security, and future and the safety, security and future of your families, your children, parents, spouses and relatives as well as the wider Gambian community. It is not too late to do the right thing, join the vocal popular Gambian revolution and help our dear little country avoid a potentially catastrophic conflict just because Yahya Jammeh is too cowardly to step down after being president for 22 long years and after being clearly defeated at a free and fair election. So we say unto you as well, members of the Jammeh cabinet, please don't die for Jammeh. Tell him to step down, or resign from his government. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain by doing the right thing before it's too late. Godspeed.

(23 December 2016)

Author's Note: Please share as widely as possible with our dear brothers and sisters of the Gambia Armed Forces and in the Jammeh cabinet, their families, relatives and friends. We must nurture our beautiful new Gambia and protect our dear brothers and sisters in uniform. Let's loudly say to them #Don'tDieForJammeh!

40

From exile with love

As I watched Yahya Jammeh get off Gambian soil and step into the plane that carried him into exile, I felt heaviness in my chest and tears pouring uncontrollably down my face. No, they were not tears of joy at the fact that the tyrant who forced me and many other innocent Gambians into exile was himself now being forced into exile. Indeed, I cannot pretend to know why the tears poured out of my eyes and kept doing so for so long. Perhaps it was my sense of the tragic nature of human life; perhaps it was the reaffirmation of my conviction that those who make other people's lives miserable must in the end become miserable themselves – that we indeed do reap what we sow, as Jammeh is now destined to do for the rest of his life. Perhaps it was because finally, the giant rock of injustice we have been striking for so long has finally crumbled into dust and our dear little country has been given a new lease of life.

Exile is a desert of the spirit. From day to day, the exiled person longs to return to home, to walk on the earth of their birth, to see the familiar scenes of their home, to visit the places they frequented as a child, to meet old friends and relatives and

to revel in the sweetness of being surrounded by their own people, people who appreciate them as a person and who do not define them by the colour of their skin. The exiled person watches from afar as their parents succumb to the hand of death and they are not able to go home to witness their burial or to visit their final resting places. They think of the longing in the eyes of their mother or father as they lay on their death beds, wishing they could see their child one last time and knowing how futile that wish was. The exile's siblings and friends and relatives pass away and they feel chained to their spot of exile. The parents of dear friends and neighbours – kind elderly men and women who treated them like their own children in their childhood days – pass away and they are not able to go commiserate with their families. Day after day, they hear of people passing away, some distant relatives, some dear childhood friends, some school mates or respected neighbours and they are unable to attend their funerals or visit their families. The pain of longing for home grows deeper by the day as the years pass by and they remain stuck in a foreign land. Once in a while, they dream of home only to wake up and realize that they are so far away from home and cannot go home because of a tyrannical regime that has claimed ownership of their country and denies them the right to live and work in their own motherland.

Exile is an intolerable condition and one tolerates exile just because one has to. For some of us, exile was made reasonably tolerable by the fact that we remained perpetually connected to home. We refused to take our eyes off the reason for our exile and persistently hammered away at the foundation of the evil that was the regime of Yahya Jammeh. We insisted on spiritually and emotionally living at home and having our say in the affairs of our country – the say which Yahya Jammeh sought but failed to deny us. We insisted on our freedom to participate in the discourse on the future and destiny of our dear country that Yahya Jammeh sought but failed to deny us. We insisted that tyrannical regimes like Yahya Jammeh's could force us into exile, but they could never force us to remain silent and therefore be accessories to the ritual political murder of our country that he repeatedly committed through his unbridled and mindless despotism. For us, going physically into exile did not translate into going mentally into exile. While we physically lived in a faraway and often hostile land, our hearts and minds spent every single day and night, every minute and hour on the soils of our dear Smiling Coast, tending to the wounds that the Jammeh regime continuously inflicted on our dear motherland. Silence was never an option for us and hesitation or compromise on matters of truth and justice as far as they affected the future and destiny of our country was never an option. We were determined to keep calling Yahya Jammeh out and vigorously chipping away at the seemingly stout trunk of despotism he represented until it collapsed under its own weight of blunders, crimes and sins against humanity and against itself. We were encouraged by the firm knowledge that while despotism often thinks of itself as indomitable and invincible, it is always engaged in a process of perpetual self-destruction that will eventually claim its life. Yahya Jammeh's tragic fate is living testimony and a reaffirmation of this natural truth. Perhaps the tears flowed down our eyes at the beauty of the truth of natural justice manifesting right before us.

People go into exile for reasons that may often be broadly categorized as either right or wrong reasons. Those who go into exile because of their insistence on respect for natural justice and the sanctity of human dignity go into exile for the right reasons. Those who go into exile because of their disrespect for natural justice and their trampling on the sanctity of human dignity go into exile for the wrong reasons. Yahya Jammeh belongs to the latter category. He is not going into exile because he was a victim of injustice but because he was a perpetrator of injustice. He is not going into exile because he has seen the light of reason but because he has seen and feared a real threat of physical annihilation by a force greater than himself. Yet, unlike people who go into exile for the right reasons, Yahya Jammeh cannot remain connected in any positive way to his homeland. He cannot advocate respect for natural justice because it was his disrespect for natural justice that landed him in exile. He cannot advocate respect for human dignity because it was his disrespect for human dignity that landed him in exile. His exile will be much more painful than ours because he has no cause to fight for on behalf of the country and the people he has bullied and terrorized for 22 years. He can wallow in the lap of luxury, but he will never be able to stop or get any relief from the painful pangs of homesickness that all exiles suffer from day to day, week to week, month to month and year to year. His exile will be a much hotter and drier desert for his spirit than those who were forced into exile for the right reasons and who therefore hope to return home someday.

Exile is a strange form of prison. It is a prison that allows you to go anywhere you want but the place you most want to go – home. It is a prison that allows you to walk on any soil you want but the soil you most want to walk on – your home soil. It is a prison that allows you to touch anything you want but the thing you most want to touch – your home. It is a prison that allows you to see anything you want but the thing you most want to see – your home. And so the exile finds themselves in the paradoxical situation of being at once a free person and a prisoner of sorts. But exile may be tolerable if you are an inmate in its strange prison for the right reasons – for standing up against despotism and injustice. If, as in Yahya Jammeh's case you are an exile for the wrong reasons, for perpetuating despotism and injustice, for trampling upon the lives and dignities of innocent human beings, this strange prison will prove much more excruciatingly painful. For while those exiled for the right reasons may entertain and be nurtured by the hope of walking on their home soil again if they live long enough, those exiled for the wrong reasons may hardly dare to hope for such an eventuality.

And so as the despotic regime that forced some of us into exile finally drops into the dustbin of historical infamy where it will be forever consigned, we can only say to our dear little homeland that we have never really left you. Our hearts and minds have always been with you, our spirits have always slept in your tender arms and our energies have always been directed at liberating and protecting you from the clutches of a malignant dictatorship that is now history. And so we send you dear Mother Gambia, our true and unconditional love from exile. We pray that God grants us the opportunity to see you soon and grants us the strength, wisdom and capacity to continue loving and serving you to the best of our abilities, how-

ever human, however limited. God bless you Mother Gambia, the Smiling Coast of West Africa.

(21 January 2017)

41

On the difficulty of tolerance

Tolerance is a beautiful virtue but a difficult habit to cultivate. Tolerance of our views and opinions is one thing we all want because those views and opinions are expressed from a sense of being right as far as we are concerned. We express our views and opinions on an issue because we believe that what we say makes sense and is an accurate take on the issue at hand. The difficulty arises when our views are challenged by others who, incidentally, express their views and opinions for the same reason that we do – the belief that they are right. How to strike a balance between what we believe to be right and what others commenting on the same issue believe to be right often brings into sharp relief the difficulty involved in tolerance of contrary views and opinions. Ironically, we often engage in the same intolerance that we condemn in others and the same intolerance that we are up in arms against. Some of the most outspoken advocates for the freedoms of expression and association often reveal shocking levels of intolerance of these same virtues. It is often hard to accept that we are wrong when we are convinced we are right.

This phenomenon is part of human nature, that narcissistic part of the human

psyche that makes it impossible for the evil person to know that they are evil. Ironically, it is also what makes life tolerable. If evil people knew that they are evil, life would have been much more difficult than it is under the circumstances. For example, universally recognized evil men like Hitler, Idi Amin and our own Yahya Jammeh never saw themselves as evil. They believed that they were perfectly good people and that they were right to do what they did. Tyrants do not feel their tyranny and serial killers often feel totally justified in taking the lives of their victims. Similarly, unless we consciously discipline ourselves to entertain the possibility of human fallibility and error of judgement, we are likely to manifest levels of intolerance eerily similar to the intolerance we fight on a daily basis, both in our inner family and communal circles and within the national political space.

Tolerance is a particularly difficult habit to cultivate in environments of unregulated power such as is the case in many African countries. In countries of regulated power - where the people are largely aware of their political power and where there are any number of institutional checks on the power of public figures and ordinary individuals - even the most intolerant of persons are often forced to tolerate what they otherwise would not. In many parts of Africa, on the other hand, where power is almost totally unregulated, a head of state like Yahya Jammeh could arrest and jail and kill opponents and critics with total impunity simply because they think they can get away with it. Jammeh saw no need to cultivate a habit of tolerance or to tolerate views and opinions contrary or opposed to his because the power he wielded was totally unregulated and unchecked by either the people he ruled over or the institutions of state as they operated under his regime. This is not to say that in theory, institutions such as the national constitution do not mark the limits of presidential power in Africa. What it means is that constitutional provisions cannot by themselves compel the president to abide by them. The constitution needs an enlightened and empowered citizenry to protect and uphold it with words and actions that together can force the head of state to accept willingly or unwillingly swallow contrary views and opinions in spite of himself. Power cannot be regulated by unenforced laws. It can only be effectively regulated by the force of informed public opinion backed by action or potential action aimed at achieving desired goals. Happily, as demonstrated since Jammeh attempted to thwart the will of the Gambian people, our country is now closer to a state of regulated power than ever before. And this is likely to increase in the coming months and years.

At both the individual and state levels, and in both environments of regulated and unregulated power, tolerance is often mistaken for a sign of weakness or inadequacy of some kind by a great number of people. On the contrary, the ability to tolerate and even embrace contrary views and opinions is a sign of strength, not weakness. When we exercise tolerance, we are in fact demonstrating that we are capable of exercising choice or ability without denying the same opportunity to those who disagree with us. Exercising tolerance also demonstrates our recognition of one of Mahatma Gandhi's key teachings: namely, that there is almost always an element of right on every side of a conflict or argument. People are always partially justified, at some level, in taking the positions they take or expressing the

opinions they express if only for the fact that they have the right to do so. Gandhi suggests that a conflict or argument is properly settled when this fact is recognized and requisite effort expended to determine where the greater “quantity” of right resides in this balance of rights. There always needs to be a kind of rational measurement either within the individual’s mind or within the public space to determine who or which side has more right in any particular situation and over any specific issue. Even where we are absolutely convinced that we have the greater “quantity” of right on our side, we should not arbitrarily dismiss the other party’s position out of hand. Instead, we should try to convince them not of their error, but of the greater right that we have or the greater usefulness or relevance of our position to that common interest which represents the arena of our disagreement in the first place. It is a commonplace but little noticed fact that most parties to a disagreement do have a mutual interest in the issue at hand. If there is no mutual interest, there is unlikely to be any disagreement worthy of compromise in the first place. Each party could have their say and go their different ways, perhaps never to encounter each other again.

The need for tolerance arises because the parties to a difference or conflict of opinion have a common interest in the betterment of something – a country for example. For this reason, the difficulty of tolerance needs to be recognized and rationally tackled for the sake of that common interest. The situation becomes tricky when that common interest is negated or downplayed in favour of our individual or partisan interests as happens when, for instance, a head of state in an environment of unregulated power insists, against all reason, that they alone have the interest of the country at heart. Those heads of state, of course, know deep down that it is not possible for everyone who disagrees with them to be enemies of the country. They may legitimately be enemies of the head of state because the head of state is bad for the country. But again, as we suggested earlier, the bad often do not know that they are bad. The failed though can recognize that they have failed and make amends. Or they can choose to insist that they have not failed, especially in environments of unregulated power; in which case they then find it virtually impossible to tolerate their critics or mend their ways for the common good. In environments of regulated power, the failed are forced to acknowledge their failure and step aside or make amends. In environments of unregulated power, the failed dress their failure in shades of delusional success and arrogantly strut around town, aggressively waving their “success” and “achievements” in the face of all who care to look and insisting that they be recognized for what they are not and could never be – real success and achievements. A good example was the Jammeh dictatorship’s annoying habit of insisting that it had succeeded in enhancing democracy, human rights and the rule of law and has turned The Gambia into a haven of peace, justice and security when exactly the reverse was the case. As we embark upon building a new and democratic Gambia, our key challenge is to develop a culture of civility and a spirit of tolerance for contrary views and opinions, however hostile, however opposed to ours.

(28 January 2017)

42

Beyond the politics of nation-building

Since the African state sees itself as a builder of nations but often turns out to be a breaker of nations, we need to revisit the idea of nation-building with a view to exposing its contradictions and replacing it with the idea of state-building. Exploring the concept of nation-building will allow us to put the relationship between us and our governments in proper perspective. Empirical historical evidence shows that the most successful nation-states in the world are those in which the nation (the people) builds the kind of state (government) they want. In countries where the state arrogates to itself the power and status of nation-builder, authoritarianism and a culture of repression are often the inevitable outcomes because the people are rendered progressively passive and powerless in determining their own national destinies.

We may begin by asking why is it that while “nation-building” is part and parcel of independent Africa’s political and developmental vocabulary, we never hear it in France, Britain, Portugal, Germany and Belgium, which had the lion’s share of colonies in Africa and which introduced the concept itself into Africa? We

need to recognize that nation-building is what colonialism claimed to be doing in Africa; it is not what European governments were doing in their own countries during the colonial period. And it is certainly not what independent African governments should be trying to do in their countries. If African governments claim to be nation-building, they should be people-building, that is: building the minds and intellectual capacities of their people to the extent that they would be enlightened and empowered enough to take charge of and control their governments.

Within European imperial culture, the concept and practice of nation-building betrayed Europe's assumption that colonized peoples were utterly different and therefore inferior to the colonizers. This assumption was visible in the twin concepts of the "civilizing mission" and "the white man's burden" through which the Europeans claimed they were colonizing others in order to deliver them from the darkness of their indigenous cultures into the light of western civilization. The French picked and chose those colonized peoples they considered worthy of being accepted into a superior French culture through their policy of assimilation. In Portuguese Africa, colonial subjects were considered *assimilado* only after many years of rigorous self-acculturation through education, dress, speech and table manners, among other things. Britain, on the other hand, decided that Africans were best civilized under the "subject leadership" of their own traditional and neo-traditional rulers through the so-called policy of indirect rule. Across the board, European cultures were considered superior spaces for which only a select non-European few may aspire and for which all colonized peoples needed to be grateful. Colonized cultures were debased and dismissed out of hand as the ways of a savage and backward people. Those who would not readily accept the dominant ideologies of imperial politics and religion were either written off as irredeemable children of the devil or forcefully pacified. This element of coercive pacification is inherent in the concept of nation-building, which suggests an all-seeing, all-capable state that knows what is best for the nation and arbitrarily prescribes development projects for the nation. It is a tragic feature of the politics of nation-building that the people are hardly ever allowed to contribute anything of substance to their own political evolution and welfare.

It is interesting to note that during the colonial period, when European colonizers were nation-building in Africa, the practice of nation-building had long gone extinct in their own societies. The practice of nation-building, of an all-capable, all-seeing government perched on top of the socio-political pyramid and building the nation below from those heights was unthinkable in late 19th and early 20th century Western Europe. Western European governments had long recognized, accepted or been forced to recognize and accept that it is nations (people) that build states (governments), not the other way round. The concept of nation-building was *passé* in Europe, but it remained a ghost of long dead medieval cultures that could conveniently be imposed upon colonized peoples. It was a curious practice of European imperial powers to use laws and other instruments of coercion on colonized peoples that could not even be imagined in their own societies. Long dead censorship laws and emergency measures of a totalitarian kind were resurrected from the dusty cemeteries of European political culture and imposed upon

colonized peoples. But since European imperial powers saw no contradiction in nation-building in colonized societies, they simply passed their ghost political culture on to our “independent” African leaders, for whom it soon became a favorite hobby horse because it offered them ample justification for authoritarianism.

Thus in independent Africa one-party states are declared in the name of nation building, life presidencies are proclaimed in the name of nation building, military coups are staged in the name of nation building, and banal “dictatorships for development” are imposed in the name of nation building. The people are told and made to understand in no uncertain terms that if they don’t like it they can go to hell. Rather than move away from the colonial culture of political repression and political bondage, African leaders gladly embraced and practised repression and political bondage through a variety of oppressive regimes often worse than the colonial sort. The culture of dissent that fueled African nationalism and led to independence is criminalized. Political opponents and critics of the government are pounced upon, roughed up, killed, exiled or imprisoned on bogus charges through a coterie of shadow state institutions – armed militia, political thugs, sinister “intelligence” agencies, and mercenary judges and magistrates for whom what matters is not truth, justice or the rule of law, but the word and personal interests of the president who pays their salary. It is a strange paradox that some independent African states practise a politics of hostility and insults that the oppressive colonial state would have been ashamed of. Most post-colonial African states thrive on a politics of divide-and-rule more sinister than the colonial state’s: they polarize societies and break them into distinct political clans – with those supporting the ruling party enjoying freedom from oppression, and those supporting other parties or opposed to the ruling party being constantly criminalized and persecuted. No matter what they do, supporters of the government are portrayed as faultless angels while those seen as “opposition sympathizers” are demonized and denied their rights and agency and often violently struck down.

In the New Gambia, we must aspire to a politics of state-building not a politics of nation-building. We must aspire to a politics in which the people are politically enlightened and empowered enough to hold their government accountable, not a politics in which an all-knowing state is perched on top of the social pyramid prescribing and forcing infallible prescriptions for development down the people’s throats, whether they like it or not. We must aspire to a politics in which the people are empowered enough to build the kind of state they want, not a politics in which the state assumes the status of all-powerful nation-builder, unless such nation-building means people-building in the sense we use the term above. By definition, the state is embedded within the nation and cannot therefore rise over and above the nation. For this reason, we require and must aspire to a political leadership that is sincere, a leadership that is disciplined, a leadership that will be eager to teach but also eager to learn and to drink of the public wisdom; a leadership that will not behave like the infallible and hostile lords and masters of the people, but like the humble servants and children of the nation. The kind of intellectual and moral energy that needs to be expended in order to actualize such a politics can only be generated in an environment of healthy civility and mutual respect between and

Baba Galleh Jallow

among all members of society, regardless of age, gender, political, economic or religious status or affiliation.

(6 February 2017)

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Not politics as usual (1)

One of the reasons Yahya Jammeh lost the 1 December 2016 elections is that he misread the Gambian political situation. Like all dictators, he fell from power when he least expected it because he had been shielded from the reality of Gambian political culture for too long. He did not see that his repressive practices had gradually generated a mass of popular anger, anguish, discontent and defiance just waiting for an opportunity to explode in his face. Surrounded by sycophants and minions singing his praises and willing to do everything he wanted, even if it was taking innocent lives, Yahya Jammeh remained stone blind to the fact that a significant number of Gambians had grown sick and tired of him and his repressive regime. Hence he liked to refer to those opposed to him as “the one percent” of Gambians who would never be allowed to destroy the ninety-nine percent good Gambians. While this number was totally arbitrary in its conception, it came to represent a semblance of reality for the power-drunk despot.

And so Yahya Jammeh remained supremely confident that, as he said just days before the elections, he was going to win “the biggest landslide ever.” And he lit-

erally hung himself before the fact by proudly declaring that our electoral system was rig-proof and the best in the world, that no one could ever cheat, and that even if his opponent won by one percent of the vote, he would willingly step down. His total conviction in the inevitability of his victory explains why he shut down both the international phone service and the internet on election night. It was also why he declared that no demonstrations would be allowed after the elections. He had thought that after his anticipated “biggest landslide ever”, the opposition would cry foul and decide to protest the results by holding demonstrations. Used to having electoral commissions steal the vote for him, Yahya Jammeh had no idea that things were going to be different this time around. Hence he was literally stupefied when he lost and was in a daze and state of great confusion when he conceded defeat. He could not believe what was unfolding before his own eyes and needed time to compose himself and consider his options. Because he so misunderstood and misread the landscape and tempo of Gambian politics at the end of 2016, he believed that he could concede defeat, turn around, reject the results, and inform the Gambian people as he did on 9 December that “you must go back to the polls” and they would fear and tremble and go back to the polls to elect him under his newly appointed “God-fearing electoral commission”. He thought that, as usual, Gambians would say “hey let’s just vote for him so that peace prevails.” Incidentally, a rude awakening awaited the clueless despot.

From day to day, Yahya Jammeh grew increasingly frustrated as the reality sank that this time around, he was not going to have his way because Gambians had dramatically changed and would not simply keep quiet or be afraid to express their opinions or insist on their rights to change their government. From the association of UTG teachers and staff to the Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry, all kinds of Gambian civil society organizations issued statements asking him to step down. His own ambassadors and ministers, seeing that the former ship of state had hit the rocks and was sinking, deserted the increasingly confused dictator. Thankfully Alieu Momar Njie, the principled electoral commission chair, stood by the results at great personal danger to himself. And as happy fate would have it, extenuating external circumstances aided the Gambian people. The whole world having heard Jammeh declare that our electoral system was rig-proof, and having seen him concede defeat, no one was willing to buy his bogus story that the electoral commission stole the election for the coalition. Moreover, by this time Jammeh had alienated every single international organization that mattered in the equation of world, Gambian and African politics. He had been rude to the African Union, had called ECOWAS leaders stooges of the West when they agreed to institute term limits in 2015, had withdrawn The Gambia from the Commonwealth which he called a neocolonial institution, had expelled both EU and UN personnel from The Gambia, and had repeatedly insulted the West in general, asking everyone but himself to go to hell. It must have been extremely shocking for Jammeh to see that even autocratic Russia and the Organization of Islamic Conference states were not on his side. Eventually, he was forced to allow himself to be persuaded to step down and to accept the reality that times have changed and it was not politics as usual in Gambia anymore.

And it's not ever going to be politics as usual again in Gambia. Hopefully, Mr. Barrow and his Coalition government understand that today's Gambians are very different from yesterday's Gambians. That while we still have a lot of work to do in terms of political empowerment at the grassroots level, sufficient numbers of Gambians have already been empowered to the extent that they will not sit quietly by and watch politics as usual happen in their country. The old ways of doing politics are no longer going to work. Political power in The Gambia has forever been demystified with the fall of the dictator who threatened to rule us for a billion years and who swore that elections will never remove him from power. And so the new government better take note that all of the negative baggage that characterized the Jammeh regime need to be thrown out the door of Gambian politics as a matter of urgency. Seemingly harmless practices like hanging billboards and posters bearing the president's image everywhere are passé in Gambian politics and must be discouraged by the Barrow administration. The thousands of dollars spent on this and other wasteful practices can be used to help feed the hungry beggars who frequent Gambian mosques and churches on Fridays and Sundays, or to help pay the school, college and university fees of bright Gambian children from poor families. Also to be discouraged is the practice of placing full page or spreadsheet advertisements congratulating the president at every possible opportunity by all kinds of individuals, businesses and even parastatals and government agencies. While these ads serve as a much needed source of revenue for our struggling local papers, the damage they cause to our national political psyche is serious enough to justify discouraging the practice. The government must also discourage the extremely damaging culture of sycophancy and religious hypocrisy that was such a huge feature of the Jammeh dictatorship.

Gambians expect that the Coalition government will be proactive in discouraging these corruption-enhancing practices among many others and in kick starting the significant transformative processes that would radically and positively change the face of Gambian politics from what it has been in the past. Gambians have very high expectations of the Barrow administration and all governments that will come after it. One can only hope that Mr. Barrow and his team are aware of these expectations and have what it takes to do what is expected of them by the new Gambian people. We need an enlightened, energized and innovative politics spearheaded or otherwise actively promoted by a principled transformative-servant leadership. Politics as usual is just no longer an option for the Smiling Coast of West Africa.

(7 February 2017)

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Not politics as usual (2)

Those of us who have for so long advocated the radical transformation of our society will not stop advocating it because we now have a new political dispensation in place. In fact, getting rid of the despotic regime is just the first major step in our struggle for a better Gambia. Now that the despotic regime is down and out, we must step up to the next level of advocacy in order to better contemplate our new and more delightful if equally formidable challenges. Raising our country to the next level will not come automatically, but it will prove less difficult within the context of our new democratic dispensation. And since it will not happen automatically, the logical thing to do is continue the struggle: not a struggle against despotism, but a struggle against complacency, against a very powerful tendency to fall back into politics as usual and a struggle for the actualization of those things that are absolute prerequisites for the emergence of an enlightened and empowered citizenry. Only an enlightened and empowered citizenry can prevent the emergence and entrenchment of dictatorial and despotic regimes of the kind we just kicked out of Gambia.

We are very much encouraged by the fact that the national agencies responsible for the administration of our cherished freedom of expression are now under the direction of Gambians who truly cherish those freedoms. The appointments of D.A. Jawo as Minister of Information and Ebrima Sillah as Director of GRTS can only bode well for our country, in particular for our freedoms of expression and of the press. Both men have been victims of the ousted regime's politics of brutality and intolerance. And both men possess the requisite experience that will enable them to open up our national media space and enhance the free flow of ideas and information within our family nation. We are absolutely convinced that both D.A. Jawo and Ebrima Sillah are men of principle who will not compromise their journalistic ethics and integrity when it comes to doing the right thing in their new positions of responsibility. We can only say that the Barrow administration has done very well in their choice of candidates to take charge of these very crucial institutions of our nation-state. We are hoping that the administration will move fast to take the requisite measures to remove all the obstacles and bottlenecks built into our national constitution by the ousted despotic regime that were designed to stifle the free flow of ideas and information. The free flow of ideas and information is to the nation body what the free flow of blood and oxygen is to the human body. The nation body dies or is crippled when the free flow of ideas and information is blocked, just like the human body dies or suffers a crippling stroke when the free flow of blood and oxygen is blocked. We feel very much encouraged that the Gambian nation body no longer faces such a mortal threat to its existence under the new dispensation. That, however, is no reason to relapse into a politics of complacency.

We are confident that in the new Gambia, the politics of media relations will not be what they were under the Jammeh regime. Both GRTS and other public and private media must make it a point to enlighten and empower the Gambian people. They must assume their rightful duties and responsibilities as custodians of the supreme national interest. They must report the news without fear, favour, or any form of bias. And they must open their doors and pages to all shades of political opinion unless such opinion is of a nature repugnant to the rule of law or designed to fan the flames of religious, ethnic, racial, gender or violent conflict. As our society is now characterized by a regime of regulated political power, the media must be accorded the recognition it deserves by virtue of the essential part it plays in our country's advancement. When the voice of the media is heard and understood by a critical mass of citizens in a country, revolutions follow; not revolutions that come through the barrel of the gun, but revolutions that pour out of houses onto the streets, outraged by the rampant corruption and related injustices perpetrated by people supposed to be their leaders and servants. Because of the transformative potential of the media, they are often silenced to prevent their voices from being heard and understood by a critical mass of citizens. Thanks to social media, this is proving increasingly difficult to do as Mr. Jammeh learned when it was already too late for him. But the reach of social media is still restricted and not a viable substitute for traditional media forms such as GRTS and our local newspapers.

Under the ousted Jammeh despotism, the media was stifled in the most blatant

manner just because it sought to inform and enlighten the Gambian people. Newspapers and radio stations were arbitrarily shut down; journalists were routinely arrested, jailed incommunicado and often tortured; media houses were attacked by masked nocturnal arsonists who set their hard earned premises and presses on fire simply because they wrote stories and editorials Jammeh did not like. Witness the case of the late veteran Gambian journalist Baboucarr Gaye of *Citizen FM*. In August 1998, Yahya Jammeh ordered heavily armed security forces to storm the offices of Mr. Gaye's *Citizen FM* radio station where the Citizen newspaper was also published. True to style, they ordered everyone out and put the institution under lock and key, never to open again. Mr. Gaye was arrested alongside his editor Ebrima Sillah and charged with failure to register a radio and newspaper under an old colonial telegraph act. Mr. Gaye was tried and found guilty as charged under this colonial law. While Mr. Gaye successfully appealed against the unjust conviction, Yahya Jammeh disregarded the ruling and forcibly confiscated and permanently shut down *Citizen FM*. Mr. Gaye died fighting in vain to regain his unjustly confiscated property.

Baboucarr Gaye was not punished for "operating a radio station without a licence, contrary to Section 7 (1) of the Telegraph Stations Act, Cap. 74.01 of the Laws of The Gambia, 1913." This old colonial law was called back from the dead and used to justify shutting down a bright Gambian institution by Yahya Jammeh, a man who was never tired of loudly proclaiming his total opposition to colonialism and neocolonialism. *Citizen FM* was shut down because Baboucarr Gaye was rendering invaluable service to the Gambian people through his radio station's translation and dissemination of the contents of the local newspapers in the vernacular, including government publications. The news translations were rendered in all the major Gambian languages and unfailingly drew crowds of eager audiences across the Greater Banjul Area and as far as his transmission could reach. Gambians who were not able to read English had always wondered what the newspapers were saying. Now they were being told through the *Citizen FM* translations, and they loved it. Just as they were beginning to cherish their new found mental nutrition, the Jammeh dictatorship pounced upon *Citizen FM* and cut off the essential information, forcing the Gambian nation mind back into a state of perpetual intellectual starvation. Radio stations like *Teranga FM* that attempted to render similar service to the Gambian people were invariably throttled by Jammeh and, of course, colonial and post-colonial "laws" of a personal kind were always available for his "emergency" deployment. Jammeh just could not contemplate the growth of a critical mass of enlightened and vocal Gambians. He would rather preside over a nation of uninformed, unenlightened and compliant "subject-citizens" rather than informed and empowered citizens.

From now on, we hope that Baboucarr Gaye's legacy of translating the newspapers into the vernacular would be resuscitated. Both Radio Gambia and Gambia TV must make translating the local papers into the local languages a regular and integral part of their day-to-day programming. The editorial sections of the papers must be given particular prominence because it is in their editorials that newspapers comment on critical issues of national concern. It is hoped that GRTS will not

Defying Dictatorship

shy away from translating news items and editorials critical of the head of state or any members or institutions of his government. We are hoping that the Barrow administration and all future governments of The Gambia will keep an open mind and observe the requisite levels of tolerance and civility. They must be able to take both justified and unjustified criticism. And they may only respond through rebuttals or clarifications; never through arbitrary arrests, detentions, newspaper closures, or nocturnal arson attacks on media houses and printing presses. Only through a free and responsible media can we take Gambia to the next level.

(15 February 2017)

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In search of political beauty

Pitted against dictatorship in every country are a small number of that country's citizens. It is not only that this small number is opposed to all that dictatorship represents in a country, especially its blatant political injustices. Rather, it is that this small number of citizens whom we may call "the critical minority" loudly and publicly expresses its opposition to dictatorship, often at its own peril. In a society characterized by a culture of regulated political power, the critical minority is accorded the recognition it deserves for its essential contributions to public welfare, or at least allowed the freedom to have its say without censure. In a society characterized by a culture of unregulated political power, the critical minority is criminalized, hounded, forcibly silenced, killed or forced into exile.

Whether located inside or outside the country, the critical minority relentlessly voices its opposition to injustice and calls for a culture of humane politics in their homeland. The critical minority is not inspired by hatred for the head of state as is often alleged. Rather, they are inspired by a deep-seated and well justified hatred of political injustice because political injustice is subversive of human progress

and human nature itself. Political injustice plants anger and propagates the seeds of needless animosity and mutual disrespect within communities; it generates a culture of political and social hostility, suspicion and hypocrisy that rips society apart; and it cripples the human potential to grow in life-enhancing ways. For this reason, the critical minority speaks out in anger, but always in anger inspired and moderated by love of nation, by a desire to bring the greatest good to the greatest number of the nation's citizens. It speaks to the nation, which is to say it addresses both the government and the people; and it speaks for the nation, which is to say it seeks the betterment of both the government and the people. What the critical minority seeks is the general welfare of the nation, which is to say the general welfare of all citizens of the nation. The fairness, the justice and the rights advocated by the critical minority cannot help but benefit every part of the nation, which is to say every single individual who is a part of the nation. A possible exception is that small number of people who in dictatorial regimes have selfish personal interests that are not compatible with the interests of the nation.

The critical minority persistently insists on right and justice on the home front, and hopes that their relentless advocacy, explanation and analyses of the harmful effects of injustice is helping pave the way for a healthier, more vibrant, dynamic and just political dispensation than embodied by the status quo, however moribund or dynamic that happens to be. When the voice of the critical minority is heard and understood by a critical mass of citizens in a country, revolutions occur; not necessarily "revolutions" imposed through the barrel of the gun, but revolutions that pour out of houses and compounds onto the streets, revolutions of the mind manifested through an indomitable expression of political will and determination such as the one that ousted Gambia's exiled dictator. Because of the transformative potential of their voices, dictatorships deploy any justification to silence the critical minority, to prevent their voices being heard and understood by a critical mass of citizens.

The critical minority is critical of the head of state only to the extent that the head of state equates himself with the State, which is a national public institution larger than and irreducible to the rank and status of any single individual. The head of state cannot be a personification of the State by any stretch of the imagination. The State as an institution belongs to and is subject to the Nation, the people, all the citizens of a country. Before the state there was the nation; and so the state is inevitably and inescapably an outgrowth, a by-product, and a sub-component of the nation. Both the State as an institution and the head of state as a person are embedded within the Nation and cannot possibly exist or operate over, above or outside of the Nation. In other words, neither the State nor the head of state can be above the laws that regulate everybody's lives in the Nation-State. Sadly, in dictatorships of the kind we had in The Gambia from 1994 - 2016, the head of state pretends to be bigger than the nation, which is much like the yoke of an egg trying to be bigger than the cell within which it is embedded - a natural impossibility. The quixotic attempts of African dictators to become bigger than their countries explain the mystery of their political self-flagellation: they feel the pain but are too weak to concede that caning the nation is caning the state because the state is

embedded within the nation. Every injury inflicted upon the nation is an injury inflicted upon the state. And so the dictatorship engages in mindless self-destruction even as it mindlessly destroys the nation in pursuit of its own selfish interests. Political violence perpetrated by a state is always a double-edged sword that cuts both ways. It destroys both its victim and its perpetrator. And while the victim may survive to tell the story, the dictatorship perishes and vanishes like ash in the wind.

In a dictatorship the head of state, who in Africa often renders himself coterminous with the State, cites any excuse to do what he wants to any citizen of his country, including brutal extrajudicial murder as in the case of the late Deyda Hydara of *The Point* newspaper. Deyda dedicated his life to helping prevent the Jammeh dictatorship from destroying our country and therefore destroying itself. He was among the critical minority, but while his voice was unrelenting in condemning injustices, Deyda's tone was always moderate, his words always measured, without anger, without malice, and literally pleading for reason and commonsense. Deyda was shot dead by agents of the Jammeh dictatorship not because he posed any threat to national security, or even to the security of the dictatorship, but because he persistently advocated for the preservation of both the nation and the State through a politics of truth, justice and empathy. Like all members of the critical minority, Deyda was simply in search of political beauty, and his life was taken by those whose selfish interests ran counter to the beautiful politics he advocated. One only needs to revisit his "Good Morning Mr. President" in *The Point* newspaper to see that Deyda loved his country and Deyda only wanted Mr. President to do what was best for himself and for our country. But Mr. President, drunk with the banality of power and blinded by hubris, decided that he not only needed Deyda's advice, he wanted him forever silenced.

The search for political beauty in The Gambia continues after the fall of the cruel Jammeh dictatorship. The challenges the critical minority now faces are less daunting because of the democratic environment, but they are nonetheless formidable. For while Jammeh is gone and the coercive apparatus that propped him up is being cut down to size and put on a lease of sorts, the various negative cultures and practices engendered by his brutish regime continue to lurk in the shadows of Gambian politics. The culture of sycophancy that surrounded Jammeh and offended the sensibilities of all decent Gambians is rearing its ugly head again. The Barrow administration must beware people who sing their praises simply because they are in positions of authority. Over the past fifty years Gambian politics has been reduced to an arena for the boisterous hankering after favours, both monetary and otherwise. Government officials are loudly hailed not for any profound achievements they have made, but for the mere fact that they hold certain positions and can reward those who sing their praises. The Gambia government now and in the future must be proactively vocal in discouraging such unhealthy practices.

The culture of public media sycophancy in particular needs to be actively and vigorously checked and discouraged in the New Gambia. The public media's job is to report the news and comment on unfolding events as objectively as possible, not to serve as praise singers for the president or his ministers, or for visiting dignitaries. During the Jammeh era, GRTS journalists were literally reduced to

his personal griots. Living and working in an atmosphere of political bullying and terror, they not only religiously called the dictator by all his superfluous titles of His Excellency the President Alhaji Professor Doctor Yahya AJJ Jammeh Babili Mansa at every mention of his name, but ascribed to him virtues and attributes he never had or could ever have. They loudly proclaimed that a man they very well knew was a cruel tyrant and killer of innocents was actually a pious and kindhearted man of God whose love of country and of the nation was unrivalled in the history of The Gambia. GRTS liked to hail Yahya Jammeh, an intellectual midget of mythical proportions whose understanding of African and world history was shallow at best, as the greatest pan-Africanist philosopher and patriot ever to walk the land of Africa. Everything Jammeh ever said was uncritically reported and repeated by GRTS as the truth and nothing but the truth. Everything Jammeh ever did was reported as the right and the just thing to do, even when it was clear as daylight to individual reporters that he was telling lies and doing things repugnant to human reason and natural justice.

That kind of unashamed media sycophancy is not only damaging to the personal psyches of the journalists and reporters concerned, but also to the national psyche. It spreads a culture of corrupt morals and outright lies and induces corruption in the minds of a political leadership. It is a critical component of the reason why power is said to corrupt. It must be discouraged from the New Gambia. We may not entirely blame GRTS under Jammeh's brutal dictatorship; but we will blame GRTS if they do not radically depart from that sickening culture of media sycophancy and serve as the objective and unbiased reporters of and commentators on our national news and personalities for the ultimate benefit and edification of the Gambian people. We are confident that under the stewardship of Information Minister D.A. Jawo and Director Ebrima Sillah, GRTS will be guided away from the culture of media sycophancy that was its trademark under Yahya Jammeh.

What we need in the New Gambia is not the kind of cosmetic change of leadership that happened in many African countries after independence, when African leaders simply stepped into the boots and sat upon the vacated thrones of the departed colonial rulers. What we need is a serious rethinking of both our political culture and political practices. What we need is honest, progressive and beautiful politics; the kind of beautiful politics for which Baboucarr Gaye lost everything and for which Deyda Hydara was brutally murdered. In order to find this political beauty, we need honest, principled and bold Gambian professionals with the courage of their convictions to do the right thing at all times. And who if doing the right thing means losing their jobs, will lose their jobs rather than compromise the supreme interests of the Gambian nation. The search for political beauty continues.

(20 February 2017)

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Why we need a truth and reconciliation commission

It is hard to contemplate but should by no means be dismissed out of hand that wherever he is, Yahya Jammeh is nursing hopes of making some kind of triumphant return to The Gambia. He must be scheming and plotting and exploring just how he could use whatever financial muscle and local human capital he has to return to Banjul, even to State House so he can teach Gambians a lesson they would never forget. Some of us would think that this is too far-fetched to merit serious consideration. But in my humble opinion, it is not at all far-fetched that Jammeh is certainly dreaming of making a return to Banjul sooner rather than later. Whether he does so or not depends on how our political situation evolves over the next three years and the extent to which the real Jammeh is brought out into the open for all to see and recognize.

Of course, Jammeh cannot possibly return to The Gambia without some spectacular developments of a political kind. In the few short weeks since he was forced into exile, enough grime about him has come out to get him arrested as soon as he steps foot in The Gambia. And as time goes on, the very minions he

used to commit his crimes are going to pile more and more grime upon his head. Every single crime the NIA, the Jungulars and others have ever committed will all be heaped on his head; and for good reasons too. Under tyrannical regimes like Jammeh's almost no civil servant or employee of the government dares do anything without explicit nods from the head of state. The NIA had a term for it, "orders from above." Anytime I was picked up by the NIA, I made sure to ask why innocent people were being harassed and arrested for absolutely no good reason. The NIA agents would always retort that they were "acting on orders from above". Of course, things had got so bad in Gambia in the final years of the Jammeh regime that people took it upon themselves to torture or kill other people or commit terrible crimes in a bid to please the despot. And so, ultimately, they could say they were acting on orders from above; that Jammeh ordered or sanctioned whatever crime they committed. The bottom line is that within a very short time, Jammeh would be accused of committing so many horrible crimes that he would immediately be seized should he decide to step foot on Gambian soil. In his sick mind, Jammeh could perhaps be dreaming of engineering another military coup by his remaining minions in the army. He would be dreaming that they could seize power and invite him back home. This is another illusory pipedream if for the simple reason that ECOWAS and the United Nations will no longer tolerate such military lawlessness in The Gambia. And they especially would not stand by and watch Jammeh come back to power in Banjul.

The almost impossible scenario of Jammeh coming back to Gambia should not however lead to a sense of *deja vu* on the part of our current government. In a less democratic environment, the APRC which Jammeh still owns and sponsors would have been banned and prevented from seeking any public office in the land. That has not happened in The Gambia and we can reasonably believe that since Jammeh is pulling the party's purse strings, he must be doing everything he can to make sure that the party remains a force to reckon with in Gambian politics. The opposition parties were able to win the December 2016 elections only because they pooled their resources and filed a single candidate. If that coalition crumbles, there is nothing to prevent the APRC from strengthening its position, possibly filing a candidate for president in the next presidential elections, and even winning the presidency again. And in the event that an APRC candidate for president wins, what would prevent him from granting Jammeh a total pardon and welcoming him back to the Gambia as an honoured guest and "father of the nation" as he liked to be called? One hopes that this never happens; but in order to prevent it, the coalition must make it their deliberate responsibility to remain strong and avoid the kind of fracturing that could give a simple majority to the APRC or the APRC in coalition with another party in any subsequent election. For that would mean they could welcome Jammeh back to The Gambia and grant him full amnesty from all the crimes he has committed against the Gambian people. And who could do anything about it in such a scenario? It would be legitimate political action unless the laws of the land explicitly forbid it. And since laws and constitutions could be amended, there really is nothing to stop it in the final analysis.

Making it impossible for Jammeh to come back to The Gambia or the APRC

from coming to power ever again requires practical realpolitik from Barrow's coalition government. Appropriate and rigorous enquiries into the activities of the ousted despot, his enablers and his party must be started immediately, and findings of any and all wrong doing must be vigorously and consistently publicized and discussed on national media. Jammeh's crimes are so horrendous that when they are exposed and laid bare for all to see, even some of his most die-hard supporters might think twice about ever associating themselves with him or his party. The much touted truth and reconciliation commission needs to be established without delay, its deliberations opened to the public and streamed live on public and social media. No detail should be too gruesome or outrageous to merit censorship and both victims and perpetrators must be encouraged to just say it as it is, exactly how it happened. The public must not be shielded from anything at all that happened under Jammeh's brutal watch. The large amount of hidden history created by Jammeh and his brutal regime of thugs and killers must be unearthed and meticulously recorded for both current and future generations. People who know things about Koro Ceesay's brutal murder, the 11 November 1994 incident at Yundum Barracks, the April 2000 student massacres, the deaths in custody of Sadibou Haidara and Daba Marena among others, the shooting deaths of Deyda Hydara and Lt. Almamo Manneh, the disappearances of Chief Ebrima Manneh and so many others must all be made matters of public knowledge. Gambians must be made to understand the nature of the brutal crimes and grave sins the man who pretended to be the greatest Muslim in the world was committing right under their noses.

In essence, the coalition government must not only strive to remain strong and united, it must consider it a matter of top national priority and long term security to expose Jammeh for what he is. It is not unreasonable to suggest that until 9 December 2016 when he started showing his true colours, many Gambians believed Jammeh to be the pious sheikh and defender of the faith that he pretended to be. His habit of invoking Allah's name at the beginning of every speech, making endless references to the Almighty Allah, carrying around what many people believed to be a copy of the Holy Quran and prayer beads, and dressing as an Imam even under the hottest of temperatures had the effect of stamping an image of him in the minds of many Gambians as a true man of God. Exposing his brutal crimes and his nauseating corruption through a truth and reconciliation commission will help shatter whatever remains of that illusory image and lay his character bare for all to see. Jammeh needs to be known for who and what he is by each and every single Gambian both alive and unborn. His religious hypocrisy and political jingoism need to be exposed for what they were, not only through credible narratives of his evil deeds, but by full physical exposure in national and international media.

We call upon the Barrow administration to establish immediately a truth and reconciliation commission or other commission of inquiry that will set in motion the process that will bring out the real Jammeh for all Gambians and the world to see and understand. If the coalition government does not act quickly and decisively, Gambians may yet witness the day when Yahya Jammeh will step proudly off a plane on to Gambian soil, walk on a red carpet and brag about how he told them he feared nothing but the Almighty Allah. And if our political culture does

not undergo radical transformation in terms of mass political enlightenment and empowerment, what would prevent Jammeh from seeking and winning the presidency again, especially if our political parties are fractured and engaged in endless bickering that projects an image of them as totally unequal to the task of running our country?

(6 March 2017)

Conclusion

Towards a government by the people

Democracy is often described as government of the people, for the people and by the people. That presupposes that while not all the people can hold public office, their collective will drives the operations of government. The idea is aptly captured by the concept of popular sovereignty, the idea that political power rests not in the hands of those that govern, but in the hands of the governed. The relocation of political power from government to people was one of the key characteristics of the emergent nation-state system in the 17th and 18th centuries and remains the defining characteristic of democratic polities to this day.

In many cases however, especially in Africa government of the people, for the people and by the people is little more than an empty slogan touted as proof of the existence of democratic regimes. The concept needs to be translated into a practical reality in all countries that call themselves democratic. The people must not only be said to be the true holders of political power; they must in reality be cognizant of that fact and be able to wield political power in practical terms. They must be able to remove their leaders and governments from power if they do not work in the interests of the nation whether because of lack of efficiency or for any other reasons. The question then remains as to how exactly people will be able to govern themselves and their governments whether their governments are inclined to be democratic or not.

Our national experience as Gambians over the past 22 years makes it imperative and even urgent that we actualize the ideal of government by the people in our country. Clearly, what obtained both under the Jawara administration and the Jammeh dictatorship was not a government by the people in the real sense of the term. Under Jawara, there was a reasonable level of political pluralism. Regular elections were held and people went to the polls to vote for candidates of their choice. The same process was enacted with far less credibility during the Jammeh dictatorship. One tragedy of African politics is that democracy is equated with the holding of regular elections which, whether free and fair or not, are considered to be synonymous with the practice of popular sovereignty. This outmoded conception of democracy cannot be allowed to continue characterizing the new Gambia. If it did, there would be nothing new about Gambia. It is time to take our country and our democracy to another level by making sure that political power is effectively exercised by the Gambian people both during and outside of election periods. The people should not merely be called upon once in a while to cast their ballots for our political leadership; they must be rendered proactive in our day-to-day politics and be able to do whatever it takes to hold their leaders accountable and make their voices heard whenever and wherever it matters.

In the few months since the Barrow administration took over, things seem to be looking up in terms of democratic practice in The Gambia. The release of many prisoners who might have been wrongfully incarcerated by the ousted dictatorship and especially the fact that a wronged journalist was given access to GRTS are good signs for our country. The fact that some coalition government ministers have been responsive to public opinion by publicly admitting their errors points to the emergence of an aspect of democratic culture that bodes well for our country. Respect for human rights and the rule of law must continue to be actively advocated, encouraged and demonstrated by the coalition government because it will contribute to the building of a solid foundation for the emergence of a democratic political culture in our country.

But while government responsiveness to public opinion and respect for human rights and the rule of law are important steps in the right direction for the emergence of a functional democratic culture, they still do not make a country a government of the people, for the people and by the people. That would require a level of citizen agency that can only be exercised by a people actively conscious of their power and capable of exercising it. And the only way people can be actively conscious of their power and become capable of exercising it is by understanding the source and nature of their power as contained in their national constitution. Gambians not only need to understand their constitutional rights and responsibilities under a republic; they also need to understand the nature and functions of the institutions that govern their lives under a republic. They need to understand the meaning and significance of the rule of law; namely that in a constitutional republic no one is above the law, not even the president. Most Gambians do not think of the nature of the relationship between public servants like the president, ministers, MPs, soldiers and the police on one hand and the law on the other. Many tend to equate these public servants with the law itself. Gambians need to be fully

conscious of the fact that like every other citizen, the president, ministers, MPs, soldiers and the police must obey the law. They need to know that the law stands over and above every single person living in the country, regardless of position or status and that whoever breaks the law needs to be held accountable for it. They also need to understand what the separation of powers and checks and balances mean in a republic, and what the different functions of the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary are. Only then can we have a government of the people, for the people and by the people.

It is not uncommon to hear arguments to the effect that the majority of Africans cannot be given an effective political education because they are not literate in Western languages. Given that their lives are governed by a constitutional nation-state system that operates through Western languages, and considering the low rates of Western literacy across sub-Saharan Africa and in The Gambia in particular, this argument is tantamount to imposing an interminable prison sentence on the collective consciousness of our people. We cannot afford to wait for the majority of Gambians to be literate in Western languages before we embark on a process of political education for the Gambian electorate because that is not likely to happen anytime soon.

We contend that language barriers are not obstacles to political education in The Gambia. Gambians are capable of learning anything and everything about modern constitutions, political systems, ideologies and institutions in their own local languages. No concept or theory of the Western nation-state system that governs our people's lives is so complex as to defy effective exposition, communication and understanding in Mandinka, Pulaar, Wolof, Sarahule, Manjako, Jola, Serer, Bambara, Mansuanka or any of our national languages. A well-crafted political education curriculum taught by well-qualified professionals will effectively educate our people on their national constitution and remove the anomaly between political perception and political reality that renders them perpetually unsure of how to deal with their government. It will give our people enough knowledge of their constitutional rights and responsibilities and the limits of constitutional authority which will politically empower and render them capable of holding their leaders and governments accountable. And it would represent momentous progress towards the actualization of a true government of the people, for the people and by the people.

In addition to obtaining knowledge of their constitutional rights and responsibilities and the nature and functions of the various organs of government, Gambians need to also distinguish the subtle but very important differences between leaders and rulers or mere power-wielders. On the surface it may appear that these terms are essentially the same. However, leadership has certain moral, ethical, persuasive and positively interactive undertones and connotations that ruler ship does not. Ruling or power-wielding is more of a top-bottom regime of command, control and coercion. Leadership, on the other hand, is more of a horizontal, multi-directional process of interaction and mutual influencing largely devoid of coercion and guided by certain unassailable moral and ethical standards of behaviour that equally applies to both governors and governed. In a ruler ship situation, rul-

ers insist on ruling from the front and the top. In a leadership situation, leaders lead as much as they are led. This distinction needs to be made clear to all citizens to prevent unjust power wielders who lack legitimacy from lording it over them while strutting around draped in over-flowing gowns and wearing funny hats, or carrying strings of bogus titles after their names in a bid to appear big, relevant and mysterious.

Overall, our point is that in order to establish a true democracy in the new Gambia, we must enhance the emergence of a new, politically enlightened and empowered Gambian. This we can do through a regime of healthy political education in both English and our local languages. Simplified versions of our constitution need to be required parts of all our school curriculums, from around grade 4 in elementary school. From high school right through undergraduate studies, Gambian students must be required to take courses not in the usual civics lessons, but in Gambian Studies, including Gambian history and Gambian Constitutional and Political Studies. Hence, we advocate the establishment of an Institute for Gambian Studies at the University of The Gambia that will oversee this important work of universal political education for all Gambians. Until Gambians understand the constitution and institutions that govern every facet of their lives, until they are enlightened and empowered through effective political education to hold their leaders accountable, our country will be stuck in a never-ending cycle of ineffectual and docile governance, potential dictatorship and civil conflict that no amount of foreign intervention or foreign aid can stop. The Gambian people need to govern themselves in a very practical sense of the term. We need to start building a true government of the people, for the people and by the people.

(12 March 2017)

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A tour de force...Baba Galleh Jallow is a benignly belligerent intellectual warrior.

GIBAIRU JANNEH

Chevening Scholar (2015/2016) University of Reading, the UK

This collection of essays by Baba Galleh Jallow, a distinguished journalist and academic, is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the true nature of the Jammeh regime. He provides an intellectual foundation for assessing the performance of Gambian governments in the post-Jammeh era. These essays focus largely on The Gambia, but the author addresses themes that are central to the broader debates about African politics. Jallow's arguments capture the spirit of the African Renaissance, and his writings will inspire the continued struggle against dictatorship everywhere.

DR EMIL NAGENGAST

Professor of Politics, Juniata College, Pennsylvania, USA

This collection of essays by Baba Galleh Jallow is timely and topical, as it highlights how tyrants ruin Africa. His analyses of and insights into despotism and despots have an immediacy and authenticity of a personal experience. This book should be required reading for all Gambians.

ALMAMI FANDING TAAL

President, Collecting Society of The Gambia

These essays are in the vanguard of The Gambia's second liberation and are informative about the abuses that Gambians had to endure during the '22nd July Revolution' years. The author does not deify the dictator as most were wont to doing; neither does he demonize him as most were fond of doing, too; instead, he defies him, showing him the dirty spots on his 'caftan'. These essays remind the emperor of his nakedness, shaming and helping to de-mask him. In that sense, they have therefore restorative and liberating qualities which the new leaders of The Gambia will also find useful.

HASSOUM CEESAY

Author and historian, Gambia National Museum

This collection of insightful and incisive essays says a lot about the brutal regime of Yahya Jammeh, but even much more about the criminal misgovernance that has become the lot of most African states. The beauty of the book is that it recognizes the fundamental role of the people in the making of government. When the people abdicate their sovereignty, they give room for dictatorship to thrive. For Africa and Africans, it is high time they took their fate in their own hands.

DR CHIJOKE UWASOMBA

Senior Lecturer, Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Defying Dictatorship is an illuminating account of the nature and patterns of the 22-year autocratic rule of a former Gambian leader - Yahya Jammeh. In these pacy and pungent essays, the author exudes optimism in the redemptive power of knowledge to liberate The Gambia from the vice-like grip of tyranny and usher in an era of national renewal marked by liberty and egalitarianism.

Baba Galleh Jallow, PhD, teaches history at La Salle University in Philadelphia, PA., USA.

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